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General Assembly
Twenty-seventh special session

Official Records

2nd meeting
Wednesday, 8 May 2002, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review of the achievements in the implementation and results of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s

Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade

Draft resolution (A/S-27/L.1)

The President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution issued as A/S-27/L.1, entitled "The situation of and assistance to Palestinian children".

The Assembly will first hear a statement by Her Excellency Begum Khaleda Zia, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Madam Zia (Bangladesh): Eight months ago, a terrible tragedy struck the city of New York. The unprecedented terrorist attacks of 11 September last year resulted in the death of thousands of innocents, including many from Bangladesh. We shared the pain and sorrow of New York in the aftermath of those attacks. We joined the global effort to ensure that such tragedies do not happen again. This special session of the General Assembly devoted to children provides a unique opportunity for us to come out of the post-11 September despair. This is also a fitting occasion on which to signal our renewed commitment to building a brave new world dedicated to our children. We can have no better objective. Our children are our greatest asset, the source of our joy and the future of our nations, our countries and the world.

The task before this special session is simple yet challenging. In 1990, during the World Summit for Children, we committed ourselves to specific goals. They relate to the protection of children's survival, development and rights. We must reflect upon where we stand in achieving those goals. Are our children better off today than they were 10 years ago? If not, we must ask what more needs to be done to improve the condition of our children.

The nations of the world have certainly made much progress during the last 10 years. Like the peoples of other countries, we in Bangladesh have also continued in our effort to fulfil our commitment to children's rights. Let me enumerate some of the concrete actions we have taken in this regard.

Bangladesh is proud of its national plan of action for children and of the work of the national council overseeing its implementation. The survival of children, their protection against killer diseases and improvement in the nutritional status of mothers and children are important priorities of this plan.

We have significantly increased budget allocations for primary, secondary and girls' education, primary health care and social development. These directly help children. We have been able to

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substantially increase enrolment of children in primary schools. We are particularly proud of the parity achieved in girls' enrolment. We have recently undertaken to provide free tuition and scholarships to girls up to the higher secondary level of education. These will have a positive impact on the age of marriage and the health of women and children.

In the last decade, our country has achieved a substantial improvement in immunization, control of diarrhoeal disease, vitamin A supplementation, iodized salt consumption and nutrition. Through the Bangladesh integrated nutrition programme we have demonstrated that severe malnutrition can be reduced within a short period of time among children under two years of age. This programme will be vastly expanded in the days to come.

We have adopted a multi-pronged approach to ensure safe motherhood.

Bangladesh has continued to work with commitment to stop trafficking in children, reduce child labour and implement programmes for disabled children. Our Government has undertaken projects on birth registration, early childhood development and children having problems with the law. Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world to have a separate ministry exclusively devoted to the welfare of women and children.

At the regional level, we are a part of the Kathmandu Understanding on children. We have also signed the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia.

Our success in those areas, though significant, gives us no reason for complacency. Let us not forget that millions of children continue to suffer in various parts of the world, including Bangladesh, due to poverty, malnutrition, disease, conflicts and wars. A few things need our urgent and sustained attention if we are to build on our gains of the last decade. Efforts to eradicate poverty are vital. That must begin with children and parents in the vulnerable groups. Increased investments in the health and nutrition of mothers and children are equally important. The nations of the world must also work together to create a non-violent and secure environment for our children. We cannot ignore the need to educate our children, especially the girl child. Access to continued quality education is vital for our children's welfare. In addition, the world should remain vigilant against new forms of abuse and exploitation of children and violence against them.

Concrete measures are required at the national, regional and international levels for the achievement of these objectives. We have to work consistently and continuously in support of our children. Children deserve to be at the very centre of our development agenda and of international cooperation. We must mobilize adequate international resources to supplement national efforts aimed at promoting the growth and development of our children. Both government and civil society must act across the board, supplement each others' resources and make common cause to help children.

That is the commitment we are expected to make during this special session — a commitment that will enable our children to be secure and happy and to realize their full potential. The Assembly finds Bangladesh at the forefront of efforts to give our children the best possible first start in life. I am confident that all of us gathered here will also do the same.

Before I end, on my own behalf and on behalf of my delegation, which includes civil society representatives and children, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the organizers of the special session for their untiring efforts in finalizing the draft outcome document, entitled "A world fit for children". I am sure that it will provide a point of departure for our future efforts in improving the lot of our children.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Martin Ziguele, Prime Minister of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Ziguele (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): Twelve years ago, my country, the Central African Republic, like other countries of the world, participated in this same Assembly Hall in the World Summit for Children. On that occasion, the Central African Republic, along with the rest of the international community, committed itself to protecting and promoting the rights of children and young people.

Several encounters have been held at the national level, providing local communities and the international community with a framework to establish a critical analysis of the whole situation of children and young people, along with a national plan of action

whose implementation should substantially improve the living conditions and the survival rate of all the children of the Central African Republic.

At this time of stock-taking, it is my honour to take the floor at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly to share our modest experience in the implementation of the objectives of the 1990 World Summit for Children. The results are very meagre.

Allow me to present the principal results of the implementation of our national plan of action, which was adopted by consensus not only among all social strata, but also among all our bilateral and multilateral development partners. With respect to health, after a significant drop in the rate of child mortality between 1990 and 1995, a reading of indicators today shows a dizzying rise in the year 2000, from 97 per 1,000 to 130.6 per 1,000. The rate of maternal mortality is among the highest in the subregion. The rate of vaccination coverage against childhood diseases remains low, aside from that for polio, which will soon be eradicated. Nine out of every 10 children were vaccinated in 2000. The proportion of households with access to drinking water has noticeably increased, rising from 37.5 per cent in 1996 to 54.9 per cent in 2000. Finally, the campaign against illnesses related to iodine deficiency is yielding very encouraging results, as virtually all households have increasing access to iodized salt. However, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is rising among young people, accounting for 14 per cent of the population. This will eventually deprive the nation of people essential to its development.

As to education, the net rate of school enrolment dropped between 1996 and 2000. It fell from 62.7 per cent to 42.9 per cent between 1995 and 2000. This is compounded by the low rate of school completion by elementary schoolchildren, estimated at 7 per cent, and by the very high rate of illiteracy among rural women, which stands at 81.9 per cent. The teacher-student and teacher-class ratios, both in the cities and the countryside, are subjects of genuine concern.

On the other hand, there have been very encouraging results in the area of protection and participation, by which the Government is gratified. With regard to protection, the Central African Republic has established a national commission for follow-up to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The commission is up and running and its initial and periodic reports have been approved in Geneva. In the judicial sphere, a tribunal for children has been established not only in Bangui, but also in the seven regions of the country. It will gradually be extended throughout the country, with the aim of protecting children in conflict from being subject to justice intended for adults.

With respect to participation, a children's Parliament has been established, providing a forum for our junior deputies to take a stand on major issues of the nation affecting their interests. To familiarize our children with conflict prevention and settlement techniques, an entity known as Ambassadors of Peace, comprising young people from the ages of 16 to 18, has been established. It played a major mediation role in the restoration of peace after the events of 1996 and 1997. It sponsors numerous broadcasts in the national media on the culture of peace, the culture of democracy and tolerance.

Since 1997, Mr. Ange-Félix Patassé, President and Head of State of the Republic, has promulgated a family code, several provisions of which offer the guarantees required for better protection of the rights of the child.

Finally, the implementation of the Government policy decentralizing and regionalizing political and administrative affairs is a source of hope, as it will involve the population, young people, mothers and children in the development process. It will empower communities regarding their choice of development models.

It will certainly have been noted that the degree of implementation of the Plan of Action is below expectations. Allow me, however, to present very briefly the overall context of my country over the past 10 years that, in part, explains this phenomenon. A hostile social, political and economic context has been marked by several disturbing events, the most significant of which include the social and political movements of 1990-1993, which were reflected in a transition towards democracy and a state of law; the devaluation of our currency, the CFA franc, the negative effects of which on an already fragile economy exacerbated existing poverty; the military and political turmoil of 1996 and 1997; and, most recently, the unrest of May and November 2001, which considerably hampered the Government's efforts to implement various development programmes,

including those for children. There has also been a reduction of official development assistance and a scarcity of state resources following the destruction of virtually the entire economic fabric during the military events of 1996 and 1997.

Deeply concerned by the extremely vulnerable situation of children and young people in our country, Mr. Ange-Félix Patassé, President and Head of State of the Republic, at the launching of the Global Movement for Children in 2002, made an urgent appeal to the national and international communities to mobilize to create the conditions for implementing the rights of children in our country. Our very survival is at stake. That is why, on behalf of my country, I reaffirm those commitments of the 1990 World Summit that have not been implemented. Once again, I affirm that, in the decade to come, the Government of the Central African Republic will commit to doing the following for the comprehensive well-being of its children.

We commit ourselves to making the struggle against HIV/AIDS the highest priority of our Government and to implementing programmes to protect children from the spread of tuberculosis, malaria and sexually transmitted diseases.

We commit ourselves to sparing no effort to advance and promote the right of children to have a greater say in those decisions of concern to them.

We commit ourselves to making every possible effort to combat poverty and corruption and to lessening their adverse impact on children, in particular by reducing economic gaps.

We commit ourselves to advancing the acquisition of psycho-social skills, health and hygiene education, and educational and participation programmes conveying a message of peace, justice, excellence and tolerance.

We commit ourselves, finally, to implementing the relevant resolutions of national and international meetings on children, in particular the Cairo meeting, along with the joint African position, the New Partnership for Africa's Development meeting, and all the commitments assumed at this session. The Government of the Central African Republic intends to pursue and intensify its efforts to further integrate itself into the concert of nations in order to perpetuate the Global Movement for Children. The anti-poverty struggle, good governance and the quest for conditions for sustainable human development remain our ongoing concerns.

I appeal to the international community to hasten the effective implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative, which could well help my country better to shoulder its responsibilities for programmes to assist children, in particular basic social services. I also urge that my country be accorded the benefits of the treatment enjoyed by so-called post-conflict countries. Finally, I appeal for the creation of conditions conducive to peace-building in the Central African Republic, without which any action for children is doomed to failure from the start.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda.

President Museveni: We met here ten and a half years ago to agree on the global agenda for children. At that time, we agreed on the following objectives: ensuring children's health and nutrition, lowering the infant mortality rate, ensuring universal schooling for children of primary school age, ensuring safe childbirth, promoting child spacing and family planning, eradicating poverty, encouraging sustained economic growth and cancelling debt.

In Uganda, we have achieved some of those targets. We have, for instance, begun a programme for universal primary education. Prior to the implementation of that programme, there were only 2.5 million children in our primary schools. After we launched it, enrolment in government primary schools jumped to 7 million, but later fell to almost 6 million because of the transfer of some children to private primary schools. Hitherto, approximately 300,000 children have been sitting for the Primary Leaving Examination every year. However, in 2003, on account of universal primary education, 1 million children will sit for this examination at the same time. In coming years, secondary school enrolment will be greatly expanded.

In order to cope with the expansion of primary school enrolment, we had to increase the number of classrooms from 47,000 (with 80 students per classroom) in 1999 to 66,000 (with 40 students per classroom) in 2001. We still have a deficit of 81,000 classrooms. Our target, however, is to have 148,000 primary school classrooms by the year 2007. We also had to increase the number of primary school teachers

from 81,000 in 1997 to 113,000 today. The teacher deficit is still on the order of 48,000.

Of course, parents in the emerging Ugandan middle class choose to pay to send their children to private schools. The government schools, however, are completely free. The children enrolled in private primary schools now number approximately 734,000. That is due to our dual-track policy: free primary education for the poor and, at the same time, a liberalized school system whereby the private sector can relieve some of the State's burden by providing a high-quality private school education. That mobilizes additional community resources without interfering with the State's efforts to provide affirmative action for the poor.

The expanded school enrolment will very soon overcome the problem of illiteracy in Uganda. However, our educational system must do more than that: it must produce skilled workers, scientists and managers who can be absorbed into the domestic or the foreign labour market. Currently, our country receives $505 million in remittances (private transfers) from Ugandans living abroad who perform unskilled jobs in Japan and other developed countries. If those workers were all skilled in some field, they would earn more for the country and for themselves. Therefore, our educational curriculum must be restructured to place the necessary emphasis on curricula that produce school and university graduates who can be absorbed into the labour market.

With regard to poverty eradication, we reduced poverty from 56 per cent in 1993 to 35 per cent in 2000. We would have reduced the poverty rate further by now if we did not have problems marketing what we produce. We always encounter problems with marketing both traditional crops, such as coffee, cotton and tea, and non-traditional crops, such as maize millet, legumes and other horticultural products, as well as skins, hides, fish, milk and beef and other products. We have to be able to sell what we produce.

With respect to safe drinking water, Uganda improved the percentage of its rural areas with safe drinking water from 10 per cent in 1986 to 60 per cent in 2000. The percentage of urban areas with safe drinking water was 17 per cent in 1986, but it increased to 65 per cent by 2000.

In the area of health, Uganda initially made good progress in some of its statistics. The infant mortality rate for children under one year old fell from 122 to 81 per 1,000 live births. Unfortunately, because of incompetence on the part of the 56 local governments that were granted power under the new Constitution of 1995, the infant mortality rate has again increased to 88 per 1,000 live births. That is a great shame, and we are resolved to decisively reverse the situation. We must enter into performance contracts with the local governments. If we give them resources, they cannot betray our children by allowing them to die from the six leading preventable diseases — perinatal problems (22 per cent), acute respiratory infections (20 per cent), diarrhoea (12 per cent), malaria (8 per cent), measles (5 per cent), HIV/AIDS (4 per cent). Other causes of infant mortality total 29 per cent.

Since I have been directly involved in my country's anti-AIDS campaign, we have managed to achieve good results. The prevalence rate among adults fell from 30 per cent in 1991 to 6.1 per cent in 2001. We are determined to reduce further the prevalence of AIDS, and I must take care that it does not increase again.

The catchment area of the school system is becoming an important battleground in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Since one third of the population of Uganda will soon be in school, we must have the schools deliver well-packaged information to the children, possibly every fortnight — neither too frequently nor too rarely. The teachers, in particular the head teachers, must pass this information on to the school population.

Behind all these problems lies the question of underdevelopment, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In the 1960s, Africa lost time because our leaders interfered with the private sector through the nationalization of private property, which was common practice in those days. However, the countries that did not adopt a command economy model did not do well either. Therefore, the other factor I have identified to explain why Africa lags behind is the lack of access to the lucrative markets of the world. It is now my conclusion that the most urgent demand — to underwrite all the development goals we continually talk about — is to ensure the products of sub-Saharan Africa market access to the lucrative markets of the countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It is a shame that of the $1.2 trillion of world trade in agricultural products, the whole of Africa, until recently, only

received $20 billion: approximately 2 per cent. The OECD countries spend $361 billion on subsidies, while the total spent on official development assistance programmes is just $50 billion. As sub-Saharan Africa spends more on imports than it earns from exports, who is helping whom?

It is clear that the genesis of the children's problems is partly rooted in the lack of equitable access to trade opportunities. A comprehensive approach to mankind's development is the way forward, rather than the patchy schemes that have characterized our work so far.

I travelled here with 16 children. With your permission, Mr. President, I will ask them to come to the rostrum. This is a conference for children: that is what you said, Sir. They are all children from Africa. This is my delegation, and they have come here to ask the Assembly to launch with them something they call the Girls Education Movement.

Girl (Uganda): It is called the Girls Education Movement for Africa and the world at large.

President Museveni: So now we ask you the Assembly to help us launch the Girls Education Movement.

The President: I remind speakers that statements in the debate are limited to five minutes.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon.

President Biya (*spoke in French*): It is with both solemnity and hope that Cameroon participates in the special session, which, I have no doubt, will hold a special place in the history of the Organization. It is with solemnity because there is no human cause more noble than that of the defence and advocacy of the rights of children, who, as the Bible says, are the legacy of God.

Unfortunately, as members know, the fate of children in many of the world's regions, in particular Africa, is synonymous with anguish, physical suffering and despair. Education, health and self-fulfilment are the incontestable rights of every child on the Earth. Yet, for hundreds of millions of children throughout the world, life seems a combat against adversity and the future, a horizon blocked by insurmountable obstacles. Despite this harsh reality, we still bear hope in our minds.

Indeed, the convening of this special session of the General Assembly gives us hope. It demonstrates that the entire international community believes that the living conditions of thousands of children are unacceptable and that it is determined to improve them. We therefore have a moral obligation to adopt concrete actions and decisions that alleviate the distress of the most deprived children on the planet.

Cameroon has always supported and assisted the initiatives of the United Nations system on the rights of children. In this respect, I consider that the World Summit for Children, held in September 1990, contributed to appreciable progress. Among other things, it enabled the implementation of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, and of the recommendations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As members know, that legal instrument, which is the international human rights treaty with the greatest number of ratifications, remains the main universal point of reference on the rights of the child. It is up to us to implement the Convention completely at all levels.

How is it possible to accept that millions of children are still dying each year from conditions such as diarrhoea or measles, because of a lack of treatment and prevention? How long can we tolerate the fact that 150 million children do not have enough to eat? Is it acceptable that, in the twenty-first century, nearly 100 million children — most of them girls — have no access to education?

These tragic, poverty-related living conditions are sometimes exacerbated by the consequences of war and armed conflict. It is estimated that today, throughout the world, about 300,000 children are forced to participate, starting at 5 or 6 years of age, in armed conflict. No less than two thirds of these children, who must face horror, death and massacres, are Africans.

The international community, aware of the gravity of the situation, has not remained impassive in the face of this tragedy. Cameroon welcomes the adoption, at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, of a series of protocols to strengthen the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Along these lines, we welcome Convention No. 182 of the International Labour Organization on child labour.

In connection with the protection of children in armed conflict, Cameroon believes that efforts must be stepped up as concerns the African continent. When the African Union comes into being, we will propose the creation of a specific mechanism to address this issue in the context of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

It cannot be overemphasized that concerted action on the part of the international community to eradicate poverty is the key factor in the battle to ensure respect for the rights of children. Regrettably, we cannot but note that the resolutions on the economic, social and cultural rights of children adopted at the World Summit for Children are far from having been implemented, particularly in Africa. The international community has the moral duty to honour its commitments.

Together with the assistance we can legitimately expect to receive from the international community, each of our States must make an effort to develop an effective policy in favour of children. That is why Cameroon has ratified almost all of the international instruments relating to children's rights.

In addition, Cameroon has launched a programme of action that is to a great extent based on recommendations emanating from the World Summit for Children.

We have placed particular emphasis on the following priorities: protection of very young children; provision of basic education for all children; safe drinking water and sanitation; reform of the health system, including vaccination campaigns and paediatric care; the fight against HIV/AIDS in mothers and children; protection of children in difficult situation, particularly in urban settings; and promotion of social education.

My Government will continue, to the extent of its ability and with the support of the international community, to carry out a resolute policy in the area of defending children's rights and of improving their living conditions.

I believe that the Declaration entitled "A World Fit for Children", which will conclude this session and which we endorse unreservedly, will represent the beginning of a new era of better conditions for children — an era that we will bequeath to posterity.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Hamada Madi Bolero, Prime Minister of the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros.

Mr. Bolero (Comoros) (*spoke in French*): First of all, on behalf of my country, the Union of the Comoros, and on behalf of my delegation, I should like to extend to you, Mr. President, our sincerest congratulations and to wish you every success in guiding our work.

My country, the Comoros, is pleased to be able to participate in this important meeting, designed to consider the crucial issue of the rights of the child and therefore the future of the human race.

Since children are the future of humankind, our future therefore is based on our ability to manage the present effectively — that is, to care for our children in a way that will enable them to flourish.

The eminent delegations here present must give thought to the situation of children throughout the world. We must discuss in our work the millions of children who unfortunately have no future in this world. We must also share our views on the situation of those children who in many countries are still subject to various types of exploitation.

Today the image of very young children working in factories, in appalling conditions, is an all too familiar sight. The image of the thousands of underage children who are sexually exploited throughout the world is a difficult one for us.

We have seen pictures of hundreds of child soldiers who are fighting the bloodiest battles in hotbeds of tension throughout the world. In many of our countries, children are also suffering from hunger, drought, illiteracy and various illnesses. They have become the primary victims of the poverty that is gripping several countries.

To achieve a minimal standard of living, families must abandon their children to scourges that lead to dehumanization and the crumbling of the moral foundations underlying human dignity.

Once abandoned, children are left to make their own way in the streets, in fields, factories and in hotbeds of tension, where they join militias or become mercenaries. Let us not forget those deeply distressing

images of thousands of orphans abandoned to their plight, utterly vulnerable because they have no parents and no source of support. They are also ravaged by such illnesses as AIDS and malaria, which are truly the jaws of death.

The situation of children deserves to be considered in a forum of this scope. We must propose adequate solutions here and now.

It is inadmissible that, at the dawn of the third millennium, we, as leaders of countries, can accept the fact that children are being deprived of the minimum of comfort and care required to make them into genuine citizens.

It is inadmissible also tnat the children of peoples who embrace fundamental human values do not have what they need to experience a peaceful childhood leading to a fulfilling life.

Let us raise our voices loud and clear in order to categorically reject all of these forms of exploitation of children, and let us as forcibly as possible combat these inhuman and degrading practices. The status of children must be protected, so that the future of the human race can be safeguarded as well.

The people of the Union of the Comoros are convinced that with will and solidarity at all levels of decision-making — internationally and in our respective countries — that situation could be speedily reversed. For their part, the people of the Comoros, through their Government, reaffirm their commitment to strengthening provisions to protect children's rights. Measures already taken in this area have made it possible to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. My country is investing the bulk of its resources in education and health care for children. Despite our efforts to that end, the overall rate of school enrolment has remained unchanged since 1990. To a great extent that situation can be explained by the substantial increase in the population.

In my country, saying "yes" for children has meant setting out the major priorities that will guide our policy to protect children in the decade to come: education for all; the fight against poverty and HIV/AIDS; and protection of children against all forms of exploitation and violence.

We as leaders must now agree to make a date with history. We must provide the peoples and nations of the world with solutions that are capable of meeting the hopes to which this high-level forum has given rise. A shared vision of our situation could thus lead to worldwide action capable of effectively championing the system of values that we endorse.

The solidarity of peoples and nations is the best way to ensure that the world continues to move towards greater peace and stability. The people of the Comoros are convinced of that. This is particularly important, since our people are emerging from a crisis that almost challenged the very foundation of the country, the first victims of which would have been the children of the Comoros. After four years of separatist crisis, as they take their first steps within the union that is in the process of being firmly established, the people of the Comoros are confident that they will be able to benefit from the spirit of international solidarity that will ensure the effective protection of the status of the child.

In 1997, a secessionist crisis developed on the Comorian island of Anjouan. Responding to the request of the authorities of the Comoros, the international community as a whole, acting under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity, mobilized to support the Comoros in its search for a just, equitable and lasting solution to that crisis.

Thus the inter-Comorian dialogue, which received the continued support of the international community — to which I would like to pay tribute on behalf of the authorities and the people of the Comoros — led to the start of a new era in the management of the crisis in the Comoros, with the signing, in Fomboni on 17 February 2001, of the Framework Agreement for national reconciliation, which brought together all the people of the Comoros.

The Framework Agreement for national reconciliation established the organizational structure necessary to lead my country towards a new Comorian entity, which guarantees broad autonomy for the islands, with respect for national unity and territorial integrity. Thus, the new constitution, adopted on 23 December, changed the official name of my country from the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros to the Union of the Comoros. In the wake of that development, and in order to consolidate the new-found reconciliation, the former secessionist island of Anjouan was the first to adopt its own domestic legislation and to elect an executive head of the island — Mr. Mohamed Bacar, who is here today as

part of the now reconciled delegation of the Comoros. The smallest island — Mohéli — also elected a leader in conformity with its own legislation. The island of Grand Comoros, too, will have elected a leader by the end of May.

In confirmation of this dynamic process in which all the parties are involved, I am pleased to announce to the community of nations, which has gathered together at United Nations Headquarters, that, on 14 April, my country also elected its first President. Indeed, this morning His Excellency Mr. Azali Assoumani was proclaimed the first President of the Union of the Comoros. The election of our leader has brought to an end, once and for all, the institutional and constitutional crisis by ensuring a return to normality. The process that is under way will lead us to further elections within the context of the political decentralization of the country.

My country has thus regained the institutional capacity that is required at all levels if we are to ensure that we can better protect the rights of the child throughout the entire territory of the Comoros.

The question of the status of the child in the world takes us to the very heart of the issue of the solidarity which must exist among peoples and nations. Although some countries are able to find the necessary resources to embark on national policies to protect the rights of the child, many countries are unable to shoulder that burden alone. We therefore need clearly to define the mechanisms for that necessary complementarity, so that the battle that we want to fight will be crowned with success throughout the world. As long as there is one child in the world without a future, we will have to consider our work incomplete.

Long live international solidarity and long live children!

The President: I would like to appeal desperately to those representatives who carry one of recent civilization's best — although very noisy — inventions, the mobile phone, either to put them into silent mode or to turn them off completely while they are in the Assembly Hall. I would greatly appreciate the Assembly's cooperation in this regard.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Otmar Hasler, Prime Minister of the Principality of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Hasler (Liechtenstein): Children are the future of our families as well as of our countries. Investing in our children means investing in ourselves. We have a strong moral obligation, and it is obviously in our own interest, to make the investments necessary to give every child an opportunity to fully develop his or her personal capacities, both for the sake of the child and as a contribution to the stability of our societies.

The United Nations has played a commendable leading role in the fight for the rights of children worldwide and the protection of their interests. Liechtenstein also attaches particular importance to regional cooperation in the common fight for children's rights, especially in the framework of the Council of Europe. I would especially like to mention a new Convention which was adopted last week and which will reinforce the basic right of children and their parents to maintain contact on a regular basis.

Today, we are looking back at over 10 years of intensive activities carried out both by States and by the United Nations system in the follow-up to the landmark World Summit for Children. A decade ago, there were strong voices of scepticism in connection with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Today, the Convention is the most universally embraced human rights treaty in history. That unprecedented success makes it clear that the Convention has to remain the basis for our activities in this respect. The Optional Protocols to the Convention, and other legal instruments such as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, provide further protection to children in areas where they are especially at risk of being victimized or exploited. Twelve years after the Summit, we have the necessary legal standards; what is still lacking is their implementation.

The outcome document which will be adopted at the end of this special session provides an overview of the problems which children worldwide continue to face. It constitutes a solid foundation for future action. The effects of armed conflict on children, various forms of sexual exploitation, the worst forms of child labour and the special vulnerability of children to the HIV/AIDS pandemic have caught our attention as areas where national and international action is particularly needed. All these issues constitute large-scale crises which can be addressed only through immediate and concerted action by all of us.

But we must also focus on the root causes of the continued vulnerable position of children worldwide, and must develop long-term strategies in that respect. Education must play a crucial role in protecting the rights of the child, as that is the only way of enabling children to develop their potential and to express themselves. Children must not only be the object of our continued attention; they must also be given their own voice and an opportunity to participate in decisions on matters affecting them.

Providing educational systems is largely a national responsibility, but the eradication of poverty worldwide will obviously play a decisive role in facilitating such national policies. I also believe that the strong role of families, which constitute the basic unit of society, continues to be an important element in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

Mr. Sevilla Somoza (Nicaragua), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I understand that negotiations on the outcome document are at a crucial stage. It is our conviction that the special session must reconfirm the outstanding vital role of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and must adopt a strong rights-based approach. With regard to other issues in the outcome document, it is my firm belief that the solution to controversial issues is to be found in the progress made in other forums since the World Summit. During the past decade, the United Nations has convened a number of conferences of outstanding significance, many of which have led to important results in a variety of areas. This special session, rather than weakening the achievements of the past, should be an occasion to forcefully reconfirm what we have all agreed to on previous occasions.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Beriz Belkic, President of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

President Belkic (*spoke in Bosnian; interpretation furnished by the delegation*): I shall heed the President's admonition and will abbreviate my statement.

The last decade of the past century in Bosnia and Herzegovina was marked by suffering, war, poverty, twofold transition, an increase in the number of persons infected with HIV/AIDS, child trafficking, minefields and the destruction of families through loss of one or both parents. In other words, Bosnia has experienced everything that can have a negative impact on children and their basic rights — such as the rights to life, health, education and the best possible start in life. Bosnia and Herzegovina therefore has a special interest and responsibility to participate actively in the process of fighting for the rights of children at home, in the region and globally.

I welcome this special session, which is also special for a number of different but very important players in the process devoted to the rights of children. Those players are members of parliament, religious leaders, physicians, children and youth themselves, as well as civil society. Only together — all of us together — can we respond to the challenges ahead of us and end the vicious circle.

The fight for child rights, with all these actors at the three key levels of the State, the region and the world, gives us hope that, although we did not succeed in achieving our goals at the beginning of the millennium, at least we are going to do so for the generation that is being raised today and for those which will come tomorrow.

In the regional context, the Federal Republic of Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina jointly organized a regional preparatory conference for the special session in Berlin in May 2001. Representatives of 52 countries from the region, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), children and youth representatives participated in the Berlin conference, which confirmed once again that child rights do not divide but unite.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as co-organizer of the meeting with the Government of Germany, is planning to participate actively in continued regional consultations, the evaluation of the regional process and the enactment of the guidelines for further work. On this occasion, I would like once again to express our gratitude to the Federal Republic of Germany for its significant contribution in hosting and holding that outstanding conference.

In June this year, Bosnia and Herzegovina will host a regional conference for 27 countries at which a child rights regional network of NGOs will be created as proof of our commitment to strengthening the regional network of non-governmental organizations devoted to children.

Improving the living conditions of children is one of our main goals in the overall development of our country. War, transition, poverty and family disruption have all obstructed and held back overall development and have reflected particularly on children. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 22.5 per cent, one third of the population, are children under 15 years of age. In addition to the usual parameters, our greatest concern is the increased number of female children dropping out of school and the increased number of girls entering marriage at the age of 14. Information on poverty is available, while information on domestic violence is not, despite the well known fact that violence exists in families.

Once again, I would like to stress that Bosnia and Herzegovina's commitment to respect and promote child rights is at the top of our political agenda. We have just ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is determined to become a State member of the European Union. In the process of accession, Bosnia and Herzegovina will adopt the heritage of European standards and rules. Therefore, our commitment today is to build a country devoted to each child, in the desire to provide children with the best possible start in life.

A global process is truly global only if every country and every child is included. At the same time, a global goal is an individual goal for each child. The children of today are the teachers, scientists and world leaders of tomorrow. It is up to all of us here, this whole spectrum of partners, to give them a chance to respect themselves in their diversity and to teach them tolerance and how to forget the violence. Our responsibility as the leaders of today's world is to provide coming generations with hope and perspective for life in an environment of greater understanding, mutual respect and respect for the right to be loved.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Joaquim Alberto Chissano, President of the Republic of Mozambique.

President Chissano: Allow me at the outset to congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo on his election to preside over this special session of the General Assembly on children. May I also say a word of congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan on his re-election to the post of Secretary-General for a second term. I would like to assure him of Mozambique's support and cooperation in the discharge of his noble task.

The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., on 11 September are still fresh in our memories. These sad events forced us to postpone the special session on children, which was scheduled to take place last September, and we are still having difficulties explaining to our children what happened and why. It is our common duty to spare future generations from the scourge of international terrorism.

As we take stock of the progress made during the last decade, we realize that all humanity has been making every necessary effort to implement the outcomes of the 1990 World Summit for Children. However, the end-decade review provides us with mixed results, with real and tangible progress in some areas and setbacks in others.

We recognize with joy the real progress made by many countries in the reduction of infant mortality, death caused by diarrhoeal diseases, child immunization, education and the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. However, we express our concern over many of the survival and development goals set by the Summit, especially in the areas of health, nutrition and education, which remain to be accomplished. For this reason, delivering well-being to our children remains a major challenge that can be met only by our collective action. The success of this special session will be judged by our ability to adopt and implement an action-oriented, time-bound and effective international plan of action.

We are encouraged by the political will shown by the world leaders at the Millennium Summit last year in bringing the cause of children into the mainstream of the international agenda. We endorsed specific goals, such as the reduction of maternal and under 5 mortality, increases in primary school enrolment and the imperative of mounting effective worldwide campaigns against HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major infectious diseases. To meet the real needs of our children, this political commitment should be translated into deeds.

The adoption, at the African Conference on the Use of Children as Soldiers in Maputo in April 1999,

of a resolution aimed at the elaboration of an international convention outlawing the use of children under 18 years of age in armed conflicts, was also a good course of action for the protection and promotion of the rights of the child. Subsequently, the African countries met in Cairo, where they adopted an African common position on this special session. Once again, we reiterated our commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

When we met in 1990, Mozambique was engulfed in a destructive war, with painful consequences for children. The best achievement Mozambique made for children was to bring about peace in 1992 and to preserve it to this date. Peace is what enabled us to fulfil our commitments to the implementation of the 1990 Summit decisions.

Mozambique has already prepared and submitted a National End-Decade Review Report on the implementation of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. The report outlines the efforts carried out by the Government, in collaboration with Mozambican society at large, as well as by the international community, aimed at improving the welfare of the children.

It is promising to note in the report that there were improvements in many areas, such as education, health, nutrition, access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Taking into account the fact that adolescents are an important and delicate segment of our society, our Government has been developing projects aimed at supporting them in three areas: policies and legislation, education for family life, and education for community life. We are giving special attention to questions related to adolescent sexual and reproductive health as a way to ensure that the number of people infected by sexually transmitted diseases will decline instead of increasing.

With regard to nutrition, it is worth noting that the country has enjoyed self-sufficiency in cereals since 1997. The expansion of cultivated areas as a result of peace, relatively favourable rains, the rehabilitation of transport and communication infrastructure, and favourable market conditions were the determining factors in such improvements. This has contributed positively to the improvement of child nutrition.

We have also been engaged in expanding access to education for children, regardless of their gender and social status. Emphasis has been placed on the promotion of the advancement of the girl child.

On the other hand, and with a view to promoting and protecting the rights of the child, Mozambique has ratified relevant international and regional legal frameworks, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The ratification of these instruments and the incorporation of their main provisions into our national legal framework demonstrate our political will and commitment to the effective implementation of the World Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children.

Recently, the Government and the Parliament of Mozambique jointly launched a Child Parliament. At that gathering, children representing all provinces of Mozambique had the opportunity to express themselves on the various problems affecting children and to propose solutions to overcome them. Most of the issues that we are raising reflect the problems, needs and aspirations of Mozambican children, as presented by them in their Parliament session.

It may be recalled that Mozambique was affected by floods for two consecutive years in 2000 and 2001. Allow me, on behalf of the Government of Mozambique and on my own behalf, to express our gratitude to all the countries and the international community in general for the solidarity and support accorded to us during those tragic and difficult moments of Mozambique's history, during which children suffered the most and perished in the greatest number.

Now, the reduction of poverty is our major concern and the Government has approved a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for 2001-2005, better known in our country as PARPA, which includes the following components: rapid and sustainable economic growth favouring industry and the construction sectors, particularly in rural areas; priority for public investment in human capital development, namely, in education, health and access to water and sanitation; increasing the productivity of the family sector in agriculture; the development of economic infrastructure in rural areas; social protection for the most vulnerable groups through programmes for social security; the promotion of job opportunities and self-

employment; and institutional and technical capacity-building in the areas of poverty monitoring and assessment, policy analysis and research to gain a better understanding of poverty and to identify the best strategies for fighting it. Education and health are at the top of our Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper because we need to reduce inequities and to respect the rights of every citizen, particularly children.

Before I conclude, I would like to highlight the importance of the ground-breaking report on the impact of armed conflicts on children produced by Ms. Graça Machel. We are happy to note that most of the recommendations contained in the report are being implemented, including the establishment of the Office of the Representative of the Secretary-General. My delegation supports the adoption of the outcome document "A World Fit for Children", submitted to this special session, and we call for its effective implementation at the international and national levels.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland.

Madam Halonen: Human rights belong to everyone. The rights of children are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. To meet the special needs of children, 12 years ago we approved the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and an accompanying Plan of Action. Their content is still valid, but unfortunately they have not been implemented fully. We must be able to achieve better results.

First of all, adults and children share the same world. War, poverty, environmental risks, crime and many other obstacles to a good life are affecting children's lives, either directly or through adults. Children are still involved in armed conflicts as soldiers or victims of war. Children are still living in the streets in extreme poverty and are still exposed to trafficking, crime and disease. Millions of children still have to earn a living for themselves and their families by working hard instead of attending school and playing. And all too often, we see how crime and terrorism spring from young people's despair.

Children must have the right to a safe childhood, whose most important elements are love and care. Children — girls as well as boys — must have the right to enjoy their childhood. Children must have the right to receive instruction, to gain knowledge and to learn skills for adulthood. I would particularly emphasize education for girls. Often, it is not considered as important as education for boys or is denied in practice because of household chores or other responsibilities. Girls and boys have the right to health on a sound planet. Today's worst epidemic, HIV/AIDS, affects millions of children directly or by making them orphans. Children have the right to live free from poverty. They have the right to live free from all kinds of abuse and violence. Children also have the right to live free from conflicts that destroy their homes and turn them into refugees. To promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law is to promote children's interests and rights.

Finland is well prepared for this session and has taken into consideration the views of various actors, including non-governmental organizations. Our national report tells of the progress made to date in improving the situation of children. It also notes current problems and worries. To prevent the marginalization of children, we need cooperation among families, schools and public authorities. We also need sincere consideration for others. We are worried that in our globalizing world, economic competition and the pace of work are becoming more intense so that not all parents are able to give their children enough care and time. Cooperation between public authorities and labour market organizations should promote the balance between work and family life.

The spirit of enthusiasm that began with the Millennium Summit and was present at the World Trade Organization Conference in Doha and at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey must be here today. Many of the documents we jointly approve tell what we must do. Let us remember that good resolutions in themselves do not change the world. We have to implement them.

We can make a happier future for children. We must put children first. They can speak for themselves, as they have done here in the Children's Forum. We must listen to them closely and carefully. We cannot betray their expectations. We must give them possibilities to participate in decisions that affect them in accordance with their age and maturity. Children are not the problem — they are part of the solution. Let this special session mark our recommitment to the cause of children.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Mr. Douglas: It is my distinct honour to congratulate you, Sir, on behalf of the delegation of Saint Kitts and Nevis, on your election to preside over the special session of the General Assembly on children. I would also like to congratulate Ambassador Patricia Durrant, Permanent Representative of Jamaica and Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee for the special session on children, for her tireless and dedicated efforts on behalf of the children of the world.

We are fully cognizant that in the past decade, the United Nations joined world leaders in a global effort to protect the rights of all children. My Government reaffirms its commitment to prioritize human development and, more specifically, to create a safe and enabling environment for the well-being of all our children. We are totally committed to the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children and the Lima Accord.

My Government believes that a child's formative years are of critical importance to sustained national development, giving credence to the motto, "an early and right start for children". Accordingly, my Government continues to source the requisite funds for building additional day care centres in every community and for training the required human resources throughout the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis for the benefit of children up to the age of five. Despite our budgetary constraints, we are committed to ensuring the overall development of our children.

Saint Kitts and Nevis is strategically positioned in the Caribbean region as far as primary and secondary education and health care are concerned. For more than 30 years we have been in the forefront in the provision of universal access to free secondary education. That policy, which allows for compulsory, free education from 5 to 16 years of age, has laid a solid foundation for our success in securing a 98 per cent literacy rate. We are also bridging the digital divide between the children of the developed and developing worlds by ensuring access to computer literacy and Internet services in all primary and secondary schools in Saint Kitts and Nevis. Our efforts also address the special needs of children with disabilities, which will be reflected within the framework of a new education act. Our policy is quite clear: none of our children should be left behind.

My Government strongly believes that insufficient affordability and access should not be an obstacle to optimal health. Health-care facilities are positioned in every community, thus enabling the provision of free medical and dental care to children in the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis. Our infant mortality rate has been reduced significantly, and there is 100 per cent immunization coverage for communicable diseases; 96 per cent of our population has access to basic sanitation, and 100 per cent has access to clean drinking water.

There is no doubt that other nations of the world share these achievements. However, the significance of all these impressive achievements would be diminished if we failed to save our children from the devastation of HIV/AIDS or if we failed to combat the changing pattern of that pandemic, which is afflicting more and more of the world's young pregnant women, exposing more and more of the world's children to the spectre of mother-to-child transmission. Saint Kitts and Nevis therefore uses this forum, on behalf of the children of the world, to appeal once again to the conscience of the pharmaceutical companies, of the international donor community and of the United Nations Global Fund, and calls upon them to do everything within their power to ensure access to, and the availability of, cheaper antiretrovirals.

My Government and I recognize that the Convention on the Rights of the Child has widespread implications for all sectors of society. We are moving to ensure that all groups become sufficiently aware of, and understand the rights enshrined in, the Convention.

In addition, we recognize that our traditional structures need to be revisited and reformed to address holistically the current and constantly changing issues pertaining to families and to children. Our Ministry of Social Development, Community and Gender Affairs has begun that very important process. One of the definitive outcomes of the process will be the clear delineation of the roles of the ministry, the police, and health and education agencies in the appropriate management and prevention of cases of child abuse.

With regard to law reform, our legal framework and existing policy on children and the family will be compliant with the Convention on the Rights of the

Child by 2003. Our commitment is also an integral part of the United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF) supported Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Supreme Court Family Law and Domestic Violence Judicial and Legislative Reform Project.

I am happy to declare that in 1995 the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis signed and ratified the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women and that five years thereafter, in January 2002, the Domestic Violence Act was passed and entered into force. Professional counselling services are provided for victims of gender-based violence and for perpetrators of domestic violence. In addition, extensive training pertaining to sexual offences, child abuse and domestic violence is provided to police officers, guidance counsellors, public health nurses and childcare workers. My Government has also taken the progressive step of guaranteeing adolescent mothers the opportunity to continue their education, thus addressing the major concern of society's most vulnerable. our women and children.

As we journey into the new millennium, my Government has identified key priority areas for action over the next decade: universal access to high quality early childhood development services, as this is part of our national poverty alleviation strategy; the implementation of the legislative and policy framework in partnership with the public and private sectors and in collaboration with, and with the continued support of, UNICEF and other development partners; the signing and ratification of other human rights instruments, such as the Inter-American Convention on inter-country adoption of children, to further strengthen our efforts to meet our obligations in protecting our children and guaranteeing their rights. Those commitments will serve to assist us in securing the necessary bilateral agreements for the reciprocal enforcement of our children's right to be supported financially and emotionally by their biological parents.

Other priority areas for action include: adequate monitoring mechanisms which would guarantee the promotion and protection of children's rights; systematic and comprehensive data collection and analysis that will aid in the monitoring and evaluation of progress achieved, as well as in assessing the impact of policies adopted with respect to children; the establishment of adolescent-friendly health clinics, the expansion of professional counselling services and the strengthening of sexual and reproductive education; and the strengthening of life skills-based content in our educational curriculum to ensure that all students are equally exposed to academic skills and to life skills such as effective communication, decision-making and conflict resolution.

In closing, I stress that meeting these challenges has placed great strain on our limited financial and human resources. Nonetheless, we have taken a proactive stance to ensure that this is the best time to be a child. It is our intention to make it the best time for the children of our nation and the world. We therefore challenge the international community to support the global initiative that seeks to create a world fit for children.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Royal Highness Dasho Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Crown Prince Wangchuck (Bhutan): On beh lf of the children of the Kingdom of Bhutan and on my own behalf, I should like to begin by paying tribute to those men, women and organizations that serve the cause of children throughout the world. Their dedication and compassion is a source of hope to every child living in hunger, sickness and fear.

I would like to extend my delegation's warm congratulations to Mr. Han Seung-soo on his election as President of this special session. I would like also to commend the work of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and of other organizations that have spearheaded the Global Movement for Children and are now taking it forward. I confident that, as we discuss issues of fundamental importance to the future of humankind, the collective wisdom and experience of the Assembly will yield results of great benefit to children all over the world.

While we have made significant progress in placing the issue of child welfare on national and international agendas, there is no room for complacency. The lives of millions of children today continue to be stunted by disease, illiteracy and exploitation, and their innocence shattered by terrorism and war.

Even in the developed world, drugs, crime, unequal access to education and health facilities and the disintegration of the traditional family structure all

affect their physical and emotional development, as well as their future well-being.

In reporting on the state of children in Bhutan, I am pleased to submit that we have achieved most of the goals set during the World Summit in 1990. Guided by His Majesty the King's development philosophy of "Gross National Happiness", which stresses holistic development, we have accorded the highest priority to the welfare of children. Over the past two decades, investments in basic social services have exceeded 26 per cent of the annual budget. A comprehensive primary health-care system covers over 90 per cent of the population; life expectancy has increased by 20 years to 66; the infant mortality rate has been cut by 40 per cent; and 80 per cent of our children are in schools.

In highlighting these achievements, we also acknowledge the major role played by our development partners in providing important financial and technical assistance. My delegation would also like to express its sincere appreciation to them for being sensitive to our priorities.

All of us have seen poverty, disease, hunger and pain in our societies. Many of us live and work in places or institutions where we are directly touched by the experience. My first thought on this issue remains my guiding priority today. It is our duty to build a future which ensures that every child will be free of these afflictions. To achieve this, we must all work together in a spirit of commitment, trust and mutual respect while taking great care to plan, not just a few years ahead, but generations into the future.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency The Right Honourable Justin C. Malewezi, Vice-President of the Republic of Malawi.

Mr. Malewezi (Malawi): I would like to begin by conveying congratulations to you, Mr. Han Seung-soo and to the Secretary-General from my President, Mr. Bakili Muluzi, for convening this special session on children, following the terrorist atrocities of 11 September 2001, which killed thousands of innocent people of many nationalities. The Malawi Government condemns all acts of violence and terrorism.

We in Malawi commend the President and the Secretary-General for their commitment to the cause of children. I would also like to thank Ms. Carol Bellamy and her colleagues for their untiring efforts in the preparation of this special session.

The Malawi Government is fully committed to creating a world fit for children and has consistently prioritized children in its actions at the national and international levels since the 1990 World Summit for Children. Malawi has also campaigned for the Global Movement for Children, and we reaffirm our commitment to encouraging the participation of children and young people in all decisions affecting their lives.

The outcome document addresses all issues that are crucial to socio-economic development and the rights of the child. We fully endorse all of the articles of this document and are committed to undertaking all necessary actions to translate this vision into reality.

The Malawi Government is committed to promoting healthy lives and has increased budget allocations for health care over the past eight years. There has been notable success in the area of immunization. Malawi has maintained immunization coverage of 75 per cent for all antigens for over eight years, and we are committed to ensuring that these successes are not reversed. There has been no confirmed polio case since 1992. Measles has been virtually eliminated, with no confirmed cases in 2000 or 2001, and the World Health Organization has declared Malawi to be measles-free. Additionally, neonatal tetanus has been virtually eliminated.

Malawi's commitment to immunization has been recognized by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), and we introduced the new pentavalent vaccine in January 2002.

Despite these successes, we still face many challenges in the area of maternal and child health. Maternal mortality has almost doubled over the past decade. The nutritional status of children has shown no appreciable change since 1992, with nearly half of our children chronically malnourished or stunted in growth. The rate of acute malnutrition or wasting remains at 5 to 6 per cent for children under 5, and malnutrition rates have increased recently due to the severe food crisis that Malawi is facing. While the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper is giving priority to these issues, we appeal to the donor community to support the Government's efforts to promote household-level food security by increasing smallholders' access to

yield-increasing technologies and by increasing food aid in the next agricultural season.

We recognize that education is a basic right — a key factor in reducing poverty and in promoting democracy, tolerance and development. The Government has consistently increased education's share of the national budget, prioritizing primary education. The introduction of universal free primary education in 1994 was a landmark achievement of the new Government. As a consequence, enrolment increased from 1.9 million children to 3.4 million in 1995. The Government has also expanded access to secondary education and is giving priority to access by the girl child to secondary education by offering scholarships to all girls in secondary schools.

The sudden increase in enrolment following the introduction of free primary education put severe pressure on facilities and on the number of teachers. Classrooms were overcrowded, with one teacher teaching on average 140 pupils. Since there was an inadequate number of qualified teachers, we had to recruit a large number of untrained teachers. These factors had a negative impact on the quality of education. We are addressing the issue of quality in primary education through increased investment in teacher training, teaching and learning materials and infrastructure, but progress is constrained by the very high rate of attrition of teachers due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We have introduced life skills into the primary school curriculum to ensure that all children and young people are informed about HIV/AIDS and are better equipped to avoid risky behaviour and to reduce their vulnerability.

Malawi established a Child Rights Unit in its Human Rights Commission in 1999, and is committed to protecting children from abuse, violence and exploitation. The Law Commission of Malawi has begun its review of existing legislation to ensure conformity with international human rights standards, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Malawi has also implemented a number of measures for children in need of special protection. Malawi is a signatory to all International Labour Organization conventions pertaining to the abolition of child labour, and national legislation has been enacted to regulate the minimum age for employment.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is a global emergency and a key threat to achieving the goals set out at the World Summit for Children, as well as the Millennium Declaration development goals. The HIV/AIDS pandemic will kill more people in Africa than died in all the wars of the twentieth century combined, and it will have created 40 million orphans by 2010 if no action is taken. AIDS has a uniquely devastating impact on development and is at the centre of a global development crisis. Addressing the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other principal communicable diseases must be part of a unified response that should be moved on to a war footing. The fight against HIV/AIDS and other diseases requires our energy, unity and full commitment, but we also need resources commensurate with the scale of the disaster threatening our future. Unless we make this global commitment now, all our efforts on behalf of children will be undermined.

Keeping young people HIV-free is the key challenge facing world leaders. Young people are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but they are also the leaders of today and can be the most powerful agents in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

While the Malawi Government is fully committed to implementing all strategies outlined in the draft outcome document, this will require a significant increase in resources from both national Governments and the international community. Additional resources can be provided in a variety of ways. First, faster and deeper debt relief would release money to fund poverty reduction programmes. Secondly, the international community should fully finance the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Thirdly, the international community should implement all the recommendations of the recently released report of Commission on Macroeconomics and Health. Fourthly, the international community should increase aid levels to 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product and increase the proportion of aid that is targeted to the poorest countries. Fifthly, national Governments should allocate more resources to poverty reduction and at least 15 per cent of their budgets to health.

We have the technologies to make the world fit for our children. We need to sustain the political will to make it happen. The international community made solemn commitments at the Millennium Summit to address poverty. For the sake of our children, let us implement those agreements now.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Alhaji Aliu Mahama, Vice-President of the Republic of Ghana.

Mr. Mahama (Ghana): It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to address the Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session, devoted to children. This unique session is devoted to the review of the achievements in the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the 1990 World Summit for Children.

I join previous speakers in congratulating Mr. Han Seung-soo on his election to preside over this special session. We are confident that under his able leadership, the work of this session will be crowned with success. In pursuance of Ghana's commitment to the well-being of its children, in 1992 Ghana formulated a 10-year national programme of action, with a mechanism for monitoring progress on its implementation, entitled "The child cannot wait". That document, which served as a working tool for organizations working with and for children in Ghana, was based on the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and its Plan of Action.

In order to ensure that information on the rights of children was disseminated widely, the Government, working together with non-governmental organizations, initiated educational activities relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention was also translated into six major Ghanaian languages.

The process of law reform relating children in Ghana, which began in 1995, has been a major achievement in the past decade in relation to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The review of all existing laws relating to children and the enactment of the Children's Act has guaranteed that national legislation conforms to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Ghana, like many other countries, has achieved mixed success in terms of the goals and targets set at the 1990 World Summit for Children. On health, access to primary health-care services and facilities has improved in the past decade. Immunization coverage against the six childhood killer diseases, including measles, whooping cough and polio, is almost 90 per cent. Due to successful National Immunization Days with high coverage, Ghana is beginning to win the fight against polio. The result has been a reduction in the infant mortality rate from 103 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 56 per 1,000 live births in 1998.

In conformity with the goals of the Summit, Ghana launched a free, compulsory and universal basic education programme in 1996. That programme has remarkably improved primary school attendance rates. In addition, a girls' education unit was established to give special attention to girls' education, reduce the dropout rate for girls and increase girls' transition rate to senior secondary school.

Our commitment to the pursuit of the best interests of children is also evidenced by the appointment of a cabinet-rank Minister for Women and Children. This is to ensure that issues of gender disparity, which have a negative impact on children, are addressed at the highest level. These and other measures taken on behalf of children are to ensure that legislation and policies already enacted will be enforced with full government support.

In spite of these and other policies and programmes that have been adopted, Ghana could not fully realize its desired goals for its children because of a lack of resources. Fluctuation in world prices for our export commodities, coupled with high petroleum prices on the international market, our growing external debt and dwindling official development assistance have greatly limited the amount of resources at the disposal of the Government for the care of children. This trend, as all here are well aware, is prevalent in many developing countries, in particular those in sub-Saharan Africa.

The lack of adequate resources is a major challenge to the well-being of children in our part of the world. Thus, sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest child mortality rates, lowest immunization coverage and lowest school enrolment rates. In addition to these problems, there is the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS and armed conflict on these children, a situation which continues to deepen the persistent poverty faced by them.

We in Africa acknowledge that it is our responsibility to ensure the well-being of children on our continent. Unfortunately, we are unable to meet this all-important obligation. It is in this regard that we call on the international community to respond to the call in the Millennium Declaration and to make a "first call" for children in Africa. We also call on the

international community to support the efforts of Governments on the continent in their pursuit of the goals of the World Summit for Children, in the spirit of international solidarity. We, for our part, are making every effort to mobilize resources locally to improve the situation of our children through a programme dubbed the "national Partnership for Children". A trust fund has also been created to support needy children with scholarships and financial aid to pay for special medical care, which has become very expensive. We have also launched the "yes" pledge for children to involve all our countrymen in efforts to build a better world for our children.

Let me now turn to some emerging issues that this session needs to address in order to ensure the well-being of all children in the twenty-first century.

The situation of children in armed conflict deserves urgent attention, and we need to take action to put an end to the awful impact of armed conflict on children. We, however, believe that the international community needs to be more forceful in bringing to justice all those who commit war crimes, particularly against women and children, to serve as a deterrent to potential perpetrators of these wicked crimes. In this connection, we urge all Member States to stop the recruitment and use of children as soldiers and to work towards the rapid and universal ratification and implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

We should also end impunity and promote accountability through the universal ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We also urge the international community to control the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons in order to protect our future generations. Equally important is addressing the issue of trafficking in children for slavery and sexual exploitation, which is on the rise in almost every region. We hope that this session will galvanize action on the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nation's Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, to deter traffickers. Without a commitment to implement these measures, our future leaders will continue to be at the mercy of the perpetrators of such horrendous crimes; and our desire to create a world fit for children will be fruitless.

It is the fervent hope of my delegation that Governments and the international community will commit the required resources to implement the outcome of this session. A world fit for children must ensure that every child gets, at the very least, one nutritious meal a day and protection from all forms of neglect, abuse and exploitation.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Armida Villela de Lopéz Contreras, Vice-President of the Republic of Honduras.

Mrs. Villela de Lopéz Contreras (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address the Assembly on behalf of the people and the Government of Honduras, headed by His Excellency Mr. Ricardo Maduro Joest. Allow me, on his behalf, to congratulate the President on his election to preside over the proceedings of this special session, which we are sure will redound to the benefit of millions of children of this and future generations.

If we were in a position to build an ideal world in which our children could grow and develop, we would include in that world peaceful and democratic nations in which terrorism, drug trafficking and drug addiction would have been eradicated. But let us pragmatically concentrate on our world and its realities.

Honduras would like to reaffirm the commitment made in September 1990 at the World Summit for Children, an event that marshalled the efforts of Governments to give priority to the rights of children. In Honduras that effort led to the implementation of a national action plan that has produced significant results in the areas of health, education and sanitation. Similarly, we are also developing a process of educational transformation in which priorities are established in relation to coverage, diversification, training and decentralization of the educational administration.

The problems faced by children in the twenty-first century may be successfully solved if we put them in their proper context, namely, the family.

In adhering to the commitment that we are about to make, the delegation of Honduras will do so on the basis of the moral, ethical, religious and cultural principles that guide our society, while constantly

bearing in mind the fundamental pillars of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, the Constitution of our country and other national and international legal instruments.

In that respect, Honduras guarantees as inviolable the dignity of all human beings and the right to life from the moment of conception until the moment of natural death. It recognizes the family as a natural and fundamental element of society, enshrines the right of men and women to contract marriage or a de facto union, and reaffirms the importance of paternal responsibility, abstinence and education in values, respecting the primary right of parents and the family to choose the education of their children and to ensure their care, sustenance and protection.

It is an honour for me to state today that, on 2 April, Honduras signed the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. These instruments will be deposited with the Secretary-General at this session.

For developing countries such as Honduras and many others represented here, the compulsory question is: What more can we do, within our capacity and scope, to improve the situation of children in our country and throughout the world? Today more than ever, those countries, particularly the less developed among them, need cooperation from the international community through the greater mobilization of resources, debt relief, development assistance, fairer trade and direct foreign investment.

One option could be that being promoted by the European Union, the Organization of American States and the World Bank to design and implement programmes for urban and rural poverty alleviation, focused on border areas. Another option could be the E-Government programme sponsored by Italy and the United Nations, which incorporates the advantages of computerization, technology and communication into public administration, to the benefit of children. These two options are valuable and deserve the fullest attention of the Government of Honduras, which hopes to implement them immediately in order to reduce the scourge of the extreme poverty of the inhabitants of 2,000 remote villages, which have no basic services and where over half the population is made up of children and young people. With God's help and international cooperation, we will be able to do so.

We intend to foster the skills of our children and young people through the Communitec programme, a project in which technology is given the compensatory role of closing the digital divide in the national and international development process. All those present here today are actors through whom the Governments of the world can welcome children as a genuine treasure, the magic ingredient of each of our countries, and facilitate their growth in a healthy, balanced and very loving manner.

Just as business and trade have become globalized, developing countries call for the globalization of solidarity for infants and children in order thus to contribute to the creation of a more appropriate environment for the children of the world. We greet the children of the world and of Honduras who are present here.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Honour Lieutenant-General Seretse Khama Ian Khama, Vice-President of Botswana.

Mr. Khama (Botswana): Botswana participated in the World Summit for Children in 1990 and signed the Declaration in 1992. At the time of the inception of our Programme of Action, Botswana had already surpassed several of the agreed global targets, save for some concerns of quality and coverage. Sadly, the situation has now changed as a result of HIV and AIDS. While the global goal was to have reduced by one third the infant mortality rate to 50 per 1,000 live births and the under 5 mortality rate to 70 per 1,000 by the year 2000, our goal was to have reduced the same rates by one third to 30 and 38 respectively by the year 2003. During that period, the infant mortality rate went up to around 37 per 1,000 live births, while the under 5 mortality rate stagnated at around 48.

Despite improved access to health services, including the recently expanded programme for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and free infant formula to children born to HIV-positive mothers who opted not to breastfeed, these child-survival indicators have now deteriorated. The infant mortality rate increased from 57 and the under 5 mortality rate to 75 in the year 2000. Our achievements in this area have not only deteriorated against our own targets, but also against the global targets.

The impact of this epidemic has also resulted in an unprecedented increase in the number of orphans, with 12 per cent of all children under 14 having at least one biological parent dead. As part of the initial response to this problem, the Government has allocated a significant budget to the orphan care programme that provides a targeted social safety net for all orphans.

Regarding the goal of reducing malnutrition among children under the age of five to half of the 1990 levels, including reducing moderate malnutrition from 15 to 7 per cent by the year 2003, it has been estimated that 12.5 per cent of children were malnourished in the year 2000. Moderate malnutrition has been recorded at 10.1 per cent. In addition, severe malnutrition has increased from a rate of approximately 1 per cent in 1993 to 2.4 per cent. Thus, we have not met our targets on this, either. This persistent deterioration may be attributed to the absence of parental care due to HIV/AIDS-related maternal deaths.

A related goal was to have reduced the maternal mortality rate by half, from 300 to 150 per 100,000 live births by the year 2003. Although there is no current estimate on this indicator, rough estimates suggest that we have not been able to achieve that goal, either. Given the current high prevalence of HIV/AIDS amongst the childbearing age groups and the high level of orphanhood, it is most likely that this rate has not improved. As part of our efforts to improve this situation, the Government has introduced universal access to antiretroviral drugs.

We have made significant efforts in increasing the number of facilities that provide services to children with special needs, from 20 in 1993 to 35 in 2000. In addition, the Government provides handicapped children with assistive devices free of charge. Furthermore, special education is being integrated into the regular education system.

Rural development has been one of the key areas in our development agenda. In this respect, there has been a significant improvement in the proportion of rural households with access to a safe water supply — from 68 per cent in 1993 to 90.5 per cent in 2000. The main constraint has been the declining yields of boreholes, induced by persistent droughts, and diminishing water resources, due to contamination and overloading. However, since the goal is to increase access to 98 per cent, and given the current efforts by the Government, there is a good chance that that goal will be achieved by the year 2003. More than 99 per cent of urban households already have access to a safe water supply, while at the national level, access is estimated at 96.5 per cent.

The Government has intensified its efforts to secure universal access to basic education and to improve its quality and relevance. Consequently, there has been an increase in access to education, from 75 per cent in 1991 to 86 per cent in 2000 for children from age 6 to 13. That represents 84 per cent of males, 86 per cent of females, 89 per cent of urban children and 81 per cent of rural children. Our efforts include the promotion of lifelong distance learning, for which we have established a college of distance and open learning to cater particularly to out-of-school students. Significant progress has been made towards achieving certain education targets, as set out in our policy on education. The transition rate from the primary to the junior secondary school level continues to be 100 per cent, while it is expected that the rate from the junior to the senior secondary school level reached 49 per cent by the end of last year upon completion of the ongoing upgrading programme.

Botswana continues to review its entire education system, with the aim of improving the quality and the relevance of basic education. Such efforts include revising the curriculum for the 10-year basic education programme, increasing the practical orientation of the three-year secondary education programme and including population-family life education dimensions. The draft adolescent sexual and reproductive health programme has been designed in such a way that facts about sexuality and health, including HIV/AIDS, are a part of the school curriculum that students are examined on.

In an effort to promote early childhood development, my Government is about to adopt a policy on early childhood care and education. That policy will provide standards and monitoring frameworks for private sector-operated day-care centres and pre-primary schools. It will further encourage parents to put their children into an early childhood educational programme.

In conclusion, my delegation encourages the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and the media, among others, to continue to expose serious violations of human rights because,

by so doing, they can increase public awareness of children's issues. My Government is fully committed to the goals contained in the Plan of Action that will be adopted at this session. We hope that the outcome document will be, not an end in itself, but rather a guide for what needs to be done in the future.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Madam Wu Yi, State Councillor for China.

Madam Wu Yi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The United Nations special session on children is an event of major and far-reaching significance. On behalf of the Chinese Government, I should like to congratulate the President for convening this conference and to thank him and the Bureau for their fruitful work. I should also like to take this opportunity to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his report to this special session, entitled "We the Children".

Over the past decade, the Governments and the peoples of many countries and the entire international community have made tremendous efforts to implement the goals established by the World Summit for Children. Positive changes have taken place, and there have been remarkable achievements in the survival, protection and development of children.

Last year, it was my privilege to preside over the Fifth East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation on Shaping the Future for Children, held in Beijing. It adopted the Beijing Declaration, expressing the determination of the participants to consolidate the achievements already attained and to enhance international cooperation to meet further challenges together.

At the same time, we should not fail to recognize that the objectives set at the World Summit for Children have yet to be completely fulfilled. In the past decade, 2 million children have lost their lives as the result of wars and conflicts and more than 10 million have lost their parents or mothers because of HIV/AIDS. We should not forget that, every year, more than 10 million children die of various diseases, 100 million are denied access to schooling, 150 million are undernourished and 600 million are struggling for survival in abject poverty. Poverty, disease and lack of education remain the main factors hindering child development. We are deeply aware of the difficulty of our mission and the magnitude of our responsibility.

To show concern for children is to show concern for the future of mankind. To protect children is to protect our future. We urgently need to take decisive and coordinated action at the national, regional and global levels to create a brighter future for children. To that end, the Chinese Government proposes the following.

First, "children first" should be the basic principle of child development. All Governments should further incorporate child development into their national economic and social development strategies and should strengthen the protection of the legitimate rights and interests of children. In addition, while giving full play to the leading role of the Government in addressing children's issues, it is necessary to mobilize all social forces, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to push for all-round development of efforts on behalf of children.

Secondly, the eradication of poverty is a prerequisite for child development. Children are the greatest victims of poverty, and poverty poses severe challenges to children's dignity and fundamental rights. To address the issue of child development at its root, it is essential to start with the eradication of poverty. At the same time, it is essential to attain universal and balanced development and to narrow the gap between regions and nations, so that all children can benefit from economic globalization and technological advances and so that social justice and fairness will be achieved.

Thirdly, an urgent task with regard to child development is highlighting priorities. We support the current special session in its effort to set feasible child development objectives and to take corresponding measures. It is our view that in our future work, priority should be given to maternal and child health care, elementary education, the control of HIV/AIDS and the protection of children's legitimate rights and interests.

Fourthly, international cooperation is an important guarantee of child development. The developed countries have the responsibility and the obligation to provide funds to the developing countries, to transfer technologies useful for the protection and development of children, and to help strengthen capacity-building of the developing countries in the field of child development. More important, the international community should create a favourable

external development environment for the developing countries so as to enable them to put more resources into the survival, protection and development of children.

It has been the Chinese Government's consistent policy to fully protect children's rights to survival, development, protection and participation. Since the World Summit for Children, the Chinese Government has been active in honouring its commitments, conscientiously improving the environment for the survival and development of children and safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests according to law, and has made unremitting efforts to promote child development. To date, China has essentially achieved the global objectives set forth at the World Summit for Children.

At the same time, we are keenly aware that child development in China still faces many difficulties and problems. In that connection, we have enacted the National Programme of Action for Children's Development in China (2001-2010), with a view to providing better guidance for our efforts in the field of child development. I am convinced that, as a country with a large population of children, China's achievements will make an important contribution to the development of the world's efforts on behalf of children.

Let us strive hand in hand to turn our beautiful commitments into wonderful realities so that all children will enjoy a brighter future, where their young minds will be free from the shadow of war and suffering and far from the menace of poverty and disease.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear the statement of His Excellency Mr. Korn Dabbaransi, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand.

Mr. Dabbaransi (Thailand): It is indeed a great honour and pleasure for me to lead the delegation of the Royal Thai Government and to address the historic special session of the General Assembly on children. I wish to congratulate the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and to express our appreciation to them for organizing this unique event, which will certainly become a landmark in our endeavour towards a Global Movement for Children.

I am confident that under the President's able guidance, the outcome of the session will be a great success. In this connection, I am pleased to pledge on behalf of the Prime Minister of Thailand, Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra, that the Royal Thai Government is fully committed to pursuing the global agenda for children that will be adopted by the Assembly. We intend to make this Global Movement for Children a truly local movement for children in Thailand. We must make all segments of Thai society rally around to promote the rights of, and ensure the well-being of, children. We shall also cooperate with other countries in our region as well as elsewhere in the world, with international agencies, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, the media and other donors and partners in this endeavour.

The end of decade progress review of the follow-up to the Declaration of the 1990 World Summit for Children has demonstrated that Thailand is close to realizing its aim of fulfilling its goals for child survival and development. However, in many areas of child development and protection, as well as in child rights promotion, we still have a long way to go. While national-level progress is impressive, the challenge remains to reduce disparities and to reach the unreached, poverty-stricken and marginalized groups. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the Royal Thai Government in 1992, remains the centrepiece of Thailand's overall emphasis on child well-being. The process of ratifying the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict is also under way.

The new Thai constitution of 1997 and our ninth national economic and social development plan, for 2002-2006, have been developed with a specific focus on human rights and human development. Accordingly, the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, such as non-discrimination, the best interest of the child and child participation, are being incorporated into the new laws and into the new National Programme of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children.

Our National Youth Commission has already approved the National Children and Youth Development Plan for 2002-2006 and the National Plan for Preventing, Suppressing and Solving the Problems of Children and Women in Trafficking, as well as

efforts on behalf of children in especially difficult circumstances.

Thailand has currently undertaken many reforms and initiatives in such areas as: political and administrative matters, decentralization, good governance, accessibility and affordability of health care, quality and relevance of education, poverty and disparity reduction and the empowerment of rural communities.

What is more important, all local administrations throughout the country are encouraged to develop their plans of action for children and youth development in accordance with the five-year National Children and Youth Development Plan.

We have identified priority areas such as the role of the family; early childhood and adolescence; child protection, especially related to the juvenile justice system and to the revision of laws in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; HIV/AIDS; drug and substance abuse; trafficking; sexual and other extreme forms of exploitation; as well as child abuse and domestic violence. These issues are important not only nationally but also need to be addressed in cooperation with the countries of the region.

In this context, we are pleased that the Millennium goals of the United Nations and specific priorities and strategies identified by various United Nations bodies based in Bangkok, such as the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, are being emphasized. The International Labour Organization, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization are also focusing on these issues.

We should be happy that we have come a long way in fighting for the rights of the child, but we cannot be complacent; the battle has to continue. We, the global community, must pursue it without doubt or hesitation by enacting relevant policies and legislation to safeguard our children from the risks and dangers they face and to provide opportunities for their survival, development, protection and participation.

It is wonderful to see the active involvement of youth in this special session. It is my ardent belief that the youth delegates present today will one day dictate policies for the protection and well-being of the world's children. They are the pillars of any society and, by reinforcing this foundation, we will be able to create a stable and peaceful society where all humans, young or old, will be treated justly, and with respect and dignity. Without firm political commitment at the highest level, it will not be possible to reform or refine our policies, programmes, budgets and institutions to ensure the best interest of children. Let us pledge today to make a world fit for children. We must begin by making our countries fit for children. We must therefore not only say "yes" for children today, but also translate our beautiful words into actions. We must transmute actions into better, cleaner and safer lives for children. For it is these children who are with us today who will one day come back to the Assembly as responsible delegates and make their judgement on the commitments you and I have made in this gathering. So, my friends, we must not fail. We must not disappoint our children.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Páll Pétursson, Minister of Social Affairs of Iceland.

Mr. Pétursson (Iceland): Allow me at the outset to express my satisfaction with this special session of the General Assembly and with its large and distinguished gathering. Let me also express particular pleasure with the historic Children's Forum preceding this event. I can confirm that the Icelandic child representatives were extremely pleased with the Forum.

Allow me to convey my admiration and gratitude to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and informative report "We the Children". The report demonstrates the great challenge of improving the living conditions and welfare of children all over the world. The report makes often depressing reading, as it reveals the most distressing aspects of the situation of children. However, it also contains a hope for the future by demonstrating the achievements already made.

By international comparison, the children of my country, Iceland, are indeed fortunate, as they are blessed with peace and security, good health care and education. We must, however, continue to acknowledge

that children deserve special attention and that their rights and needs have to be recognized and their situation improved. We must also ensure their participation in society by respecting their freedom of expression and their right to be heard.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child should continue to be the cornerstone of our efforts to enhance the status of children. The Government of Iceland remains committed to the implementation of the Convention and of its two Protocols, which Iceland has already ratified.

The Icelandic Government has in recent years taken a number of steps towards a better society for children. This is documented in our national report on follow-up to the World Summit for Children. I will highlight a few aspects of that report.

Each parent in Iceland is entitled to a three-month maternity/paternity leave, which is not assignable, and, in addition, they are entitled to a three-month joint leave, which they may divide among themselves as they please. The aim of this law is to ensure each child's access to both its father and mother. This has proved a great success.

In order to raise awareness of children's issues and rights, an office of Child Ombudsman has been established. A special focus has also been given child protection through the operation of the Government Agency for Child Protection. In addition, an Assessment Centre for Child Sexual Abuse — the Children's House — has been operating for a few years. This is a multi-agency project that provides comprehensive children's services under one roof.

Recently the Icelandic Parliament passed new legislation on child protection. The number of treatment and rehabilitation facilities for youth with alcohol and drug problems has been increased. Finally, I would like to mention that, in conformity with a resolution passed by our Parliament, we are creating a comprehensive public policy on children's issues, accompanied by a plan of action. The outcome document, "A World Fit for Children", will represent a welcome input into our work.

Children all over the world are affected by armed struggle, poverty, lack of basic education and appropriate medical services, and insufficient protection. All feasible measures should be taken, in accordance with international humanitarian law, to ensure the protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict. We are especially concerned about the plight of children in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We all need to accept responsibility and to define our priorities for the welfare of children. Let us hope that the Declaration and Plan of Action deriving from this special session will be put into practice by each and every one of us in our actions at both the national and international levels.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to Mrs. Corazón Juliano Soliman, Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development of the Philippines.

Mrs. Juliano Soliman (Philippines): On the occasion of the special session of the General Assembly, it is my distinct honour to convey to Mr. Han Seung-soo the personal greetings of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Republic of the Philippines, and her wish for a fruitful and successful special session. It is our fervent hope that our meeting will represent yet another milestone in our continuing efforts to build a world fit for children.

Twelve years ago, the leaders of the world convened the World Summit for Children to secure a better future for children. That Summit resulted in the Declaration and Plan of Action and in the signing by many countries of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since then, that Convention has become the universal instrument that has been ratified more than any other.

When we reviewed our progress, our regional efforts yielded a substantial number of positive results. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted, at its ministerial meeting for social welfare and development, held in Singapore in August 2001, the Declaration on the Commitments to Children in ASEAN.

We have committed ourselves to act, through the mutual sharing of information and best practices on child rights, to develop family support and family life education programmes and to create employment opportunities for its adult members.

At the fifth East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation, held in Beijing in May 2001, we committed ourselves to giving our children better opportunities, through the adoption of the Beijing

Declaration for Children in the East Asia and Pacific Region for 2001-2010.

I wish to cite our accomplishments on child rights implementation in the Philippines. Our latest achievement was the ratification by the Philippine Government on 23 April 2002 of the twin optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

In the last decade, the Philippine Congress has enacted 24 laws on children; the most recently approved was the Republic Act, which institutionalizes an early childhood care and development system. A significant accomplishment for the decade was the adoption of the Philippine national strategic framework plan for development for children, or "Child 21", a 25-year framework plan to guide stakeholders in developing plans, policies, programmes and services for children using a life-stage and child-rights approach. Efforts at mainstreaming child rights and "Child 21" are now under way in at least 70 per cent of our provinces and 25 per cent of our cities.

With regard to the end-of-decade goals, we have reduced the infant mortality rate from 57 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 36 in the year 2000. The mortality rate for children under 5 declined from 80 in 1990 to 49 in 2000. We have also reduced the maternal mortality rate from 209 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 172 in 1998. Similarly, the prevalence of underweight pre-school children under 5 years of age has been reduced from 9.80 per cent in 1990 to 9.2 per cent in 1998. Households with access to safe drinking water have increased from 73 per cent in 1990 to 87 per cent in 1998, while those with access to sanitary toilets increased from 68 per cent to 81 per cent for the same period.

In the area of child development, our elementary school participation rate increased from 85 per cent in 1992 to 96.4 per cent in 2000. With greater access to basic education, the simple literacy rate has increased from 89.8 per cent in 1989 to 93.9 per cent in 1994, without any significant difference between males and females.

Despite some notable achievements as concerns improved child protection, the overall number of children requiring special protection has increased. Allow me to say, however, that it was during the past decade that we achieved best practices in responding to issues on children, through partnership with the private sector, civil society and international organizations in protecting urban working and street children and victims of abuse and exploitation. In particular, the United Nations Children's Fund has been an active partner in implementing our fifth country programme for children.

In the area of protecting children within the justice system, the Philippine Supreme Court has approved three child-sensitive rules of court, namely, those relating to child witnesses, juveniles in conflict with the law, and the commitment of children for rehabilitation purposes. We have provided training and have upgraded centres and court facilities, in order to lessen the trauma caused by repeated interviews with and testimonies of children involved as victims, witnesses or offenders in a case.

In summary, the last decade has created pockets of hope and energy zones for children's rights and welfare. Our investment in children is inadequate; we need additional resources for investing in children, our greatest asset. Partnerships between Government and civil society must also be sustained, and children's issues should never be politicized. These are, in fact, issues of humanity that concern us all.

The role of the family as a basic unit of all our societies must be underscored. It is in the family that a child is born, is nourished and develops. The environment of the family is therefore a critical factor in shaping the destiny and future of our children.

While we take action to strengthen families, we are also concerned that many children continue to suffer from hunger. We need to respond immediately to urgent issues of children's survival. We must listen to them, as the Secretary-General has said. They must be empowered so that they can defend and protect their right to grow and develop. We need to engage in a massive campaign to promote and protect children's rights and welfare, especially in these times when conflicts are being resolved through the blood of children, women, the elderly and other vulnerable groups.

The United Nations has a very significant role to play in this regard, especially in creating a child-friendly world. It is an international obligation, not only because of the conventions we have signed but

also, more important, because we have an obligation to them, our children.

We believe that we can achieve the goals we have set for ourselves by sustaining a maximum level of political will and resolve. This exercise is best exemplified in the global "Say Yes for Children" campaign. I am happy to report that this campaign has received an overwhelming response in my country. Filipinos want a better world for our children.

We are optimistic that this special session will, indeed, bring about a world fit for children. We owe it to our children's children to return to them a borrowed world order — one that is improved and much better than when we ourselves came into the world.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Hamilton Lashley, Minister of Social Transformation of Barbados.

Mr. Lashley (Barbados): I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all those involved in the organization of this session, and also to pay special tribute to Ambassador Durrant of Jamaica, as Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee for the special session.

The progress of nations today is being measured internationally, not merely by the old methods of analysing gross domestic product or gross national product statistics, but by assessing the quality of life. In order to improve human development, therefore, we must improve the quality of life for all persons, including children. Barbados applauds the United Nations for hosting this special session to review the progress made over the past 10 years in enhancing the lives and protecting the rights of children and youth.

Barbados' national socio-economic development programming has always prioritized human development, particularly the development of children and women. This is evidenced by its signature and ratification, in October 1990, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and by the maintenance of high standards in the provision of social services. We plan to further emphasize children's rights by launching the Global Movement for Children later this month, and will continue to develop policies, programmes and legislation to address systematically deficiencies in our service delivery.

I am proud to say that our national programming revolves around the United Nations agenda for children. The fundamental principles of the Convention, including those for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, have always been embodied in our Constitution and social legislation. The Status of Children Reform Act dispensed with the concept of illegitimacy and legislated equality under the law for all children. Protection of the child's best interest is featured in our legislation and national childcare programming. Our national policy is geared towards the continuous improvement of the standard of care and the elimination of abuse and neglect. There are complementary non-governmental organization (NGO) programmes on good parenting and conflict resolution, and there is provision for anonymous reporting of offences against children.

While child labour is not a Barbadian phenomenon, the Government has certainly ratified International Labour Organization Conventions 138 and 182 and will ensure that children are not exploited within the working environment.

In 1997, Barbados embarked on an expanded programme of immunization against the childhood diseases of diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus and measles, and coverage of over 90 per cent has been achieved in these areas. Polio has been eradicated from the Caribbean subregion since 1994. There is universal access to safe drinking water, piped to individual homes or to shared community standpipes. A desalination plant became fully operational in 1999, further improving access to adequate supplies of safe drinking water.

Traditionally, Barbados has had a sound educational system, which facilitates social mobility. The Education Act of 1983 guarantees free public education up to the tertiary level, and compulsory education between the ages of 5 and 16. The Act provides for school attendance officers to enforce compulsory school attendance. The Government of Barbados is cognizant of the benefits of early childhood education, and there is 80 per cent coverage of three-year-olds in government-run and private day-care centres. The Ministry of Social Transformation National Disabilities Unit was also established in December 1997, specifically to promote the social integration and empowerment of persons with disabilities.

Barbados also recognizes the overwhelmingly adverse effects of poverty on development. In response to this challenge, a Poverty Eradication Bureau and a Poverty Eradication Fund have been established.

HIV/AIDS — another emerging challenge — is impacting negatively on those in the population aged 15 to 45 years. The Government of Barbados has established a national commission on HIV/AIDS management. Its main thrust is public education, and the assumption of responsibility for the programme by the Office of the Prime Minister clearly demonstrates the Government's commitment.

The breakdown of the extended family structure has deprived communities of accessible informal care, traditionally provided by grandmothers, neighbours and others. Parents' reliance has shifted to the formal care sector, with residential and day care services provided primarily by Government through the Child Care Board, complemented by private operators and NGOs.

Barbados has also embarked on an island-wide school-based Edutech Programme and a Community Technology Programme, both directed at ensuring that Barbadians are all afforded the opportunity to bridge the technological divide and that parents are better equipped to deal with challenges generated by new technology.

Among today's greatest threats to the safety and the well-being of children are the threats of global war and border disputes. They shatter millions of young lives and have also produced the spectre of child soldiers bearing illicit arms.

On behalf of the Government of Barbados, I would like to conclude with a plea for the promotion of world peace and for the international community to strive to halt armed conflict wherever it occurs. Only through peace can we ensure a world fit for our children. Children are our future. Let no obstacle be greater than the cause.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Iyad Al-Shatti, Minister of Health of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Shatti (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my honour to represent His Excellency Mr. Bashar Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, at this important session. I convey to all participants his greetings and his best wishes for the success of the special session on children.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic attaches special importance to children's issues. It provides the best care for children, as reflected in national programmes whose implementation is followed very closely by the highest political authorities in Syria. We have established a High Commission on Childhood, comprising governmental and non-governmental actors concerned with the social, psychological, health, educational, legal and cultural aspects of childhood, as well as with follow-up of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Syria ratified in 1993.

The Syrian Arab Republic has made great strides in the field of children's health, advancement and care, as demonstrated by the following indicators: the mortality rate for infants under 1 year old decreased from 33 per 1,000 in 1990 to 18 per 1,000 in 2002, and the mortality rate for children under 5 years old decreased from 44 per 1,000 in 1990 to 20 per 1,000 in 2002. The numbers are similar for boys and girls and are similar for urban and rural areas.

Syria's health strategy relies mainly on expanding primary health care and extending it to the farthest reaches of the countryside as an expression of the principle of equality. We have created the pilot "Healthy Villages" programme, which views human beings as the purpose and the means of development and which aims to improve quality of life. It is run on a local basis and focuses on the development of children, the empowerment of women, the improvement of the environment and increasing the income of local communities. A number of international organizations and active non-governmental organizations participate in that project.

Syria considers people an investment, not a burden. Therefore, the development of human resources receives high attention from our political leadership. The social values that we cherish in Syria, in addition to the activities of the Ministry of Health, render insignificant the questions of AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and diseases transmitted through illicit drug use. Free health care and free health education are available to all, and the minimum working age has been raised to 15 years.

The challenges ahead require more work and cooperation, free from the aggressive and racist

policies and practices of foreign occupation that are regrettably carried out by some countries. Those practices have negative effects on health, in particular that of children. We condemn all such practices, whether they take the form of barbaric aggression or of an unjust blockade. We stand firm with the use of the power of right rather than the right of power.

In that regard, I cannot fail to recall Israel's repression, aggression and violence against the citizens of the occupied territories in violation of United Nations resolutions concerning the Golan, southern Lebanon, occupied Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif. I reaffirm the international community's responsibility to provide protection, particularly to children, in those areas in the face of Israel's barbaric practices, which constitute flagrant violations of international law, international instruments and the world's conscience.

Syria and its President were in the forefront of those who condemned the regrettable acts of aggression on 11 September 2001. Likewise, Syria strongly condemns the arbitrary Israeli practices that have been reported by the media in all parts of the world. These have claimed the lives of dozens of Palestinian children. We hold the Israeli Government fully responsible for the massacres and violations it has carried out against the unarmed Palestinian people. Those barbaric acts again reaffirm Israel's desire to see the violence continue and the peace process halted.

We also deplore the continued unjust sanctions against the Iraqi people and the resultant suffering, which has led to the deterioration of the health of all, children in particular.

In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic, under the leadership of President Bashar Al-Assad, will continue its ceaseless efforts to establish a comprehensive and just peace, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and the resolutions adopted at the Arab Summit held recently in Beirut. We will work together for a world in which justice and peace prevail.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, Minister for Education of the Republic of the Fiji Islands.

Mrs. Kepa (Fiji): I bring warm greetings of the Government and the people of Fiji to all children: those participating in this twenty-seventh special session and those around the world. Children are a gift from God. Their presence here serves to remind us of the awesome responsibilities we have towards their development and in the service of God's creation. This special session, therefore, represents a significant force for change involving Governments, nations and people.

Fiji welcomes the Secretary-General's report "We the Children: End-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children" (A/S-27/3). The report sets out in sufficient detail the remaining multiple challenges we all face today.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified international instrument today. We applaud the implementation of the 27 children-specific goals in the World Declaration and Plan of Action.

Globalization imposes a variety of enormous challenges on societies. Traditional social safety nets are collapsing under pressures from emerging forces of change for which many societies are ill equipped.

Governments and the United Nations are thus obligated to find appropriate solutions. Fiji strongly supports the millennium development goals. In their image, we are optimistic that children will be placed at the centre-stage of Member States' respective national development goals. This special session will conclude before the United Nations convenes in Johannesburg to review the sustainable development goals that were set in Rio in 1992. The outcomes from this meeting therefore form a critical social cornerstone of our future sustainable development and must inform the deliberations in Johannesburg.

There is universal agreement that we must put the best interests of our children first. Our benchmarks are as stated: to put children first, leave no child behind and care for every child. This special session should craft a blueprint for better protection for our children today and in the immediate future.

The Fiji Government has a Coordinating Committee on Children (CCC) which was established in 1993. The Committee membership consists of governmental, non-governmental and international agencies. For greater efficiency and effectiveness, it works through its various subcommittees to focus on specific issues related to children.

The CCC has made some remarkable achievements. It has reported to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The second report is under preparation. The Government is harmonizing Fiji's legislation with the principles and provisions of the Convention. The Attorney General is now considering reports by the Fiji Law Reform Commission on children's issues in the areas of criminal law and in general offences against children. In addition, the Family Law Bill is now before Parliament. The Bill is child-centred and aims to ensure that parents focus on their children and their best interests in terms of custody, maintenance and care.

The CCC has commissioned a study to assess the impact of the political crisis of May 2000 on children in Fiji. The report has been released and is currently being studied for further action. The CCC is also formulating a strategic plan of action for a more focused implementation of the Convention. This plan will be incorporated into the Government Strategic Development Action Plan for the 2003-2005 triennium. This will ensure that resources are better targeted on children-related issues.

Fiji's national efforts have been greatly facilitated by the assistance of donors and partner agencies, including the United Nations Children's Fund, in the areas of advocacy and social mobilization, in raising awareness on children's issues and in improving the lives of our people.

Fiji is conscious of the comparatively low profile that Pacific children's issues occupy on the global map. The allocation of resources and the shifting focus of global and United Nations activities away from our region render our children vulnerable to higher risks over the next decade. We urge the global community to remain focused on the increasing vulnerabilities that small island developing States face.

It is projected that, by 2025, developing countries could account for as much as 80 per cent of the Earth's urban population. The implications of this for children are quite obvious and enormous. The urban agglomerations of the twenty-first century are a real challenge for developing countries. For Fiji, part of our solution is enhancing overseas development aid to developing countries, including the least developed. Greater coordination is essential between the recipient Governments, donors and international agencies to ensure a judicious use of aid and resources.

This session needs to set out ideal mechanisms that appropriately link the subregional and global processes and targets to implementation measures at the various levels. It is therefore necessary that the outcome document carefully place goals and targets for children within the holistic framework of the international development goals and objectives of the special session package.

Today's prevailing human rights culture has properly profiled the value of the rights of children. To our benefit, the human rights domain gives us the appropriate context for pursuing new and fresh efforts to protect and promote the welfare, well-being and human rights of all children. We acknowledge that, 10 years after the World Summit for Children, many global and national challenges remain. Nevertheless, we believe that conditions are ripe for increasing commitment and effort in this area.

Fiji is now experiencing an early onset of the urban social malaise that typically occurs in metropolitan cities. The number of street kids seems to be rising with the added socio-economic problems arising from the political crisis in 2000. From the extended family support that was the traditional safety net, families now juggle their meagre resources and onerous burdens, often at the expense of our children. The children therefore find greater solace with peers on the streets. The multiplicity of problems overwhelms our search for answers.

It is clear, however, that providing education for life is a basic need. A panel recently commissioned to review the education system in Fiji has called for qualitative improvements in the system, with sharper focus on quality, equity and relevance. The Government of Fiji spends 20 per cent of its budget on education. We recognize that, to get full value from this investment, this allocation needs to be carefully targeted.

When our task concludes at the end of this session, we anticipate an outcome that will be celebrated for realistic objectives and achievable targets that fulfil the gaps and unmet targets of our earlier action plans. Fiji hopes that this special session on children will articulate that message even more clearly in terms of policy statements, goals and resource mobilization. We can see no alternative but to nurture in our children today the virtues and quality of

knowledge, skills and attitudes that will make them responsible citizens of Fiji and the world.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Lila Teresita Abaunza de Bolaños, Minister of State of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Abaunza de Bolaños (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a pleasure to congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo on his appointment as President of the General Assembly, as well as for the outstanding work he has done thus far.

It is an honour for me to participate in this special session of the General Assembly to follow up on the World Summit for Children. I am here on behalf of my husband, the President of Nicaragua, Mr. Enrique Bolaños Geyer, but I have not come merely because I happen to be in an important position at the moment, owing to the vagaries of life, but rather because I am specially motivated to be here as a woman, a daughter, a wife and a mother.

I come knocking at the doors of the United Nations in all humility to firmly request, from this rostrum of worldwide resonance, that I be heard by those who still believe — and by those who do not believe — in the family as an institution. Listen to the ineffable reality of a child's first words: when it first names its parents it raises the pillars of its first temple of love. The consequences are devastating when we throw down those pillars. Without the family, we cannot build a society with a human face.

The family is the bond between a woman and a man: man and woman were created by God. There, they find their repose. The family is a man and woman being there for each other: together, they are the hope for the future. I say this as a mother, a grandmother and a great-grandmother who has been happily married for 52 years full of love and respect. The only kind of family is the kind full of love and understanding.

We are all part of a divine plan. We are free and therefore capable of misconstruing that plan, shirking it, straying from it and wrongly pursuing it. But even so, the family will continue to be the last bulwark before the challenge of history.

In my country, as in the rest of the world, there are a great many genuine families that alleviate their suffering and poverty with love alone. With that love, they conceive their children, make sacrifices to raise and educate them, pamper and tend to them in moments of sickness and guide them until they become worthy men and women of their community. They were born, grew up and lived among the tears and the laughter, but always had love.

However, not all fathers, mothers and families are like that. That is why I am deeply concerned at the distressing situations both in my own country and elsewhere that affect family life. A large percentage of the infants born today belong to unmarried adolescent mothers, who deprive their children of the right to a father and a stable family. It is the beginning of irresponsible fatherhood and motherhood.

We cannot legislate the love of children. However, here in the United Nations we have agreed on some measures to protect children who do not receive the love of their parents. In recent years, guided by those measures, Nicaragua has made social, legal and administrative changes, basing our vision on the doctrine of the comprehensive protection of our children and adolescents as citizens with full rights and duties. As an example and as a record of what we have done, and in order to save time, I have distributed to delegations a document summarizing those legal and administrative measures.

I am concerned about the problem of unemployment, which deprives families of their daily bread. I am concerned about the children living in the streets, exposed to the danger of drugs and prostitution. But our accomplishments are jeopardized essentially by the very real problems of poverty, natural disaster and broken homes. That is why I feel the pressing mission to raise my people's awareness of universal human values. In that context, international solidarity is vital to respond to the challenges of our time.

In 1945, the 51 founding States of the Organization truly lit a torch illuminating the truth of human beings, human dignity and human greatness, which begin at a mother's bosom. The logic of freedom must also protect the unborn and ensure their hope and future. As a daughter, I cannot ask for others anything less than what I was given: the gift of life. As a mother, I cannot aspire to less than that we forge a childhood full of love, education and moral values so that we may live in a world and in a civilization full of love and peace and worthy of human beings.

I thank God for giving me this opportunity to express with all my heart our concern and our resolve

to set a definitive course towards the future well-being of all the children of the world. May God always guide the Assembly and bless us all.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Ouedraogo, Minister for Social Action and National Solidarity of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): In this prestigious Hall, eight months after the heinous attacks against the United States, I would first like, although my country has already done so, to reiterate our condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and to reiterate the support of the people of Burkina Faso for the people of the United States.

Among the major challenges of the new century, promoting a policy of progress for our children seems the most important, because it is clear that the future of humankind rests upon them. Peace and stability in the world depend on their well-being and their awareness of their duty and sense of responsibility. That explains and justifies the fact that so many eminent persons and high-level representatives have responded today to the appeal of the Secretary-General so that together we can examine the fragile situation of children a decade after the 1990 World Summit for Children. Ten years is sufficient time to make an assessment, to measure the success achieved, to reflect on the failures and, based on that, to set out once more on a solid basis.

Mr. Dorda (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Given what is at stake and the importance of this special session, Burkina Faso, which has always placed children at the centre of its concerns, cannot stand by idly. In the campaign to defend the rights of the child, it has implemented the following measures relative to the goals established by the World Summit: the organization of a general conference on children on the occasion of the first Day of the African Child, in June 1991; the adoption in December 1991 of a national plan of action for children; the 1992 establishment of a national committee to follow up and evaluate the national plan of action and to follow up the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the creation of a permanent secretariat within that committee to enhance its operational effectiveness; the establishment of a children's parliament; the creation of a national fund for children; and Burkina Faso's 1997 ratification of the International Labour Organization's Convention on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and its 2001 ratification of the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

Although specific actions have been taken, the realization of these institutional and structural measures require a complementary strategy. Since 1992, campaigns of information, training and consciousness-raising about the rights of the child have been conducted at all levels. With respect to health and nutrition, the establishment of a national vaccination day has, since 1996, considerably reduced the extent of meningitis epidemics, which repeatedly afflict the children of our subregion; this year again we have had that bitter experience. However, I am certain that the integrated management strategy for childhood diseases will lead to a genuine improvement of the health of the children of Burkina Faso in years to come. As well, a national fund was created to effectively manage the issue of AIDS orphans.

With respect to education, the Government's efforts have led to improvements in the rate of primary school attendance, which has gone from 33 per cent in 1991 to 40.5 per cent in 1999.

Furthermore, greater attention is now being accorded to environmental education, in order to induce all children to adopt a more active and more respectful attitude towards the environment. Sports, culture and leisure activities, as we know, help teach children to strive and persevere, foster in them a greater awareness of their identity and of their capacities, and help to awaken their conscience. Hence reading centres and cultural activities are available in the main cities of the country. We also have municipal multimedia centres and a national theme park for children.

We also are establishing facilities for children in particularly difficult circumstances who are deprived of their freedom. These facilities include living quarters for minors, childcare services and social services in the country's prisons, in order to create better conditions for those children that have broken the law. Furthermore, to combat child labour, which is increasingly taking the form of trafficking for the purposes of sexual and economic exploitation, among others, the Government has set up monitoring committees in the provinces, as well as an inter-ministerial commission, to combat this scourge.

A centre known as "The Children's Village SOS" has been set up to provide orphans in distress with a family and a home in order to prepare them for a fully self-sufficient life.

While the initiatives I have referred to are undoubtedly laudable ones, the actions that have been taken are limited in terms of social and financial mobilization and also at the judicial level, where shortcomings abound.

Nevertheless, children under 15 represent 48 per cent of the population and those under 18 56 per cent of the population, which totalled more than 10 million inhabitants in 1996. This fluctuation is the result of persisting poverty, social and cultural pressures, inadequate informational, educational and communication efforts and a lack of accurate data on the situation of children, which deprives us of the specific indicators necessary for carrying out more targeted actions.

In these conditions, what actions should we in Burkina Faso take to help our children?

Although it is true that the sociocultural and economic context of my country is becoming increasingly difficult, there are grounds for hope in respect of the efforts that are already under way and of the growing awareness of the need to promote and safeguard the rights of children. Furthermore, the unfailing support of our development partners encourages us to persevere. That is why we intend to launch, in conjunction with our partners, initiatives involving grass-roots communities, through appropriate operational strategies. This involvement on the part of grass-roots communities necessarily involves decentralization.

Concerning the participation of children themselves in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an introductory process to the rights of children in educational programmes has been under way since 1999. Furthermore, the Children's Parliament will be further strengthened by greater participation of children in decision-making.

We are planning also to draw up a comprehensive text. Likewise, actions are under way that will make it possible to create children's courts covering the entire territory and to provide special training for children's judges.

It was Burkina Faso's intention, by ratifying the various juridical instruments dealing with children's rights and by drawing up a national plan of action to give effective and concrete expression to these rights, to make clear its full commitment to the genuine promotion of the status of children.

In conclusion, I should like to pay a particularly warm tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to all of his colleagues for the outstanding manner in which this session has been organized and for the opportunity that has been given to the international community once again to consider such a burning issue. More specifically, I should like to congratulate and thank the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for the very valuable efforts it is making in our countries to benefit children.

It is Burkina Faso's hope that all States without exception will, following our deliberations, abide by the decisions taken. This prompts me to recall the need to take into account countries such as the Republic of China on Taiwan, whose experience, spirit of solidarity and capacities for cooperation in this respect could make an enormous contribution to advancing the rights of children. We expect a great deal from this special session, the results of which, we are certain, will help us better to strengthen our own national policies and actions for the well-being of children.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to Mr. Djamal Ould Abbas, Minister for Social Action and National Solidarity of Algeria.

Mr. Ould Abbas (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Following the first World Summit for Children, held more than 10 years ago, world leaders adopted a Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and a Plan of Action for its implementation.

Today we must together objectively assess the actions taken during the past decade. Such an assessment must lead to the adoption of a strategy for the future, so as to ensure for our children full enjoyment of their basic rights.

It is in Africa, where half of the population lives below the poverty line, that the situation of children is of greatest concern. The infant mortality rate remains the highest in the world. The level of school attendance remains one of the lowest in the world. Health-care coverage is one of the lowest in the world. Millions of

children orphaned by armed conflicts in Africa and the AIDS pandemic suffer physically and mentally. Furthermore, every 30 seconds, a child in Africa dies from malaria. The situation of the African people makes it imperative that we take urgent global and coordinated action.

In this connection, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), launched by Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the Republic of Algeria, and endorsed by the most recent Summit of the Organization of African Unity, can serve as the general framework for the development of measures aimed at eradicating the social and economic causes that are hampering the development of children in Africa.

The children of Africa, like all other children in the world, have the right to live in peace and security, free from fear and hunger and protected from the uncertainties of the future.

Poverty, which has already rightly been termed the common enemy of humankind, underlies attempts to deny children their rights. The resulting deprivations and frustrations are ever increasing and jeopardize the gains already achieved. In this connection, globalization makes even more complex the equation between sustained and durable development and the mobilization of the financial resources needed to improve social conditions. It is very clear that the drastic decline in official development assistance, the heavy burden of the foreign debt and the negative impact of structural adjustment programmes affect basic social services and have a direct impact on the quality of life of peoples and of children in particular.

That is why a renewed political commitment on our part in favour of children is indispensable. This political will is essential to an inspired collective effort and to decisive action, but, beyond that commitment, improving the situation of children requires a new dynamic of international cooperation.

On behalf of my country, Algeria, I want to stress in particular the imperative need for creative ideas in order to establish the conditions necessary to translate into reality strategies and policies on children.

Equal access to basic education, guaranteed food security and the provision of health-care services, as well as the preservation of the environment, are challenges that must be overcome if children are to be able to flourish physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. We must also protect them against violence, abuse, exploitation, discrimination and, above all, the horrors of war if we are to provide them with a world of peace and security.

In Algeria, children, who make up more than half of the population, are a constant and major concern of the State. Algeria has dedicated considerable resources and made an enormous effort to promote the basic rights of children through the adoption of measures aimed at implementing sector-based, integrated and coordinated programmes and plans of action.

The national programme of action, adopted following the World Summit for Children, is aimed, in particular, at reducing maternal and infant mortality, improving the nutritional level of children and expectant or nursing mothers, promoting universal access to basic education and providing assistance to children living in difficult conditions.

Despite the fact that we have achieved considerable results in a number of areas, we plan to intensify our efforts with the support of the public sector and Algerian non-governmental organizations, to which I would like to pay tribute for their dedication to children's causes.

In conclusion, three years ago the Algerian Government adopted a series of social measures targeted at children that are designed to combat poverty and exclusion. These measures include providing allowances to the children of low-income families, reintroducing school lunches so as to guarantee minimum nutritional levels and making free school transportation available in rural areas or other areas where access is difficult.

Children are our most precious resource. They symbolize our future just as they give meaning to our existence. They are the source of hope for a more equitable and just world, one of peace, tolerance, mutual understanding and true solidarity.

Together, we have the historic responsibility of restructuring international activities relating to development by reconciling the remarkable progress of humankind with the imperative need to address the urgent issue of poverty. This will help us tackle more effectively the problems facing children, who make up the most vulnerable and fragile sector of society.

Together, we must act without delay to ensure that poverty and misery do not become the fate of future generations. We must act together so as to bequeath to our children a world that — in the words of the Final Declaration — is "fit" for them.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aisha Ismail, Minister for Women's Affairs of Nigeria.

Mrs. Ismail (Nigeria): I would like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and the Bureau for their painstaking preparations leading to this special session of the General Assembly on children. I would also like to commend the tireless leadership of the United Nations Children's Fund, under Carol Bellamy, for contributing to the organization of this event.

Ten years ago, we gathered here to deliberate on how we could make the world a better place for our children. Our Declaration at that time was elaborate and far-reaching. It is appropriate to ask on this occasion whether the plight of the world's children is better today than it was 10 years ago. This morning, the Secretary-General answered this crucial question when he said that the plight of children had not been improved in any significant manner. Global trends show that children still suffer from dehumanizing treatment, abuse, exploitation and deprivation. Child trafficking and sexual exploitation are still rampant, while new phenomena, such as the involvement of children in armed conflict, have emerged.

Children, who are the most vulnerable members of society, are also the principal victims of armed conflicts. We are gathered here today not to pay lip service to the world's children, but to chart a new course of action that will lift them out of the web of poverty. This is of crucial importance, given the fact that the adults of today were the children of yesterday. In fact, many of those who were children when this Assembly met 10 years ago are now adults. And the children of today are the adults of tomorrow. That is why Nigeria welcomes the participation of children in this special session. We salute their representatives and assure them that we value their contribution to our deliberations.

The problems and difficulties confronting children are, perhaps, more profound, deep-rooted and widespread in Africa than in any other continent. The figures are just plain frightening. Africa has the largest number of children orphaned from HIV/AIDS, the largest number of children not attending school, the largest number of children suffering from malnutrition and the largest number of children who die before the age of five. When we take account of the fact that children are suffering from the effects of armed conflict, the tragic dimension of this grim situation becomes even more manifest. Yet Africa is the least able to address these challenges, in spite of the best efforts of its Governments and people.

Poverty is at the root of the problems to which I have referred. It makes me sad to recall that only last week, images of children in southern Africa, dying from hunger in the arms of their mothers, were beamed across the globe on World Service television. This is an indictment of us all. I expect this Assembly to resolve that, henceforth, no child shall die of hunger. The only way of accomplishing that very important objective is for all the Governments and peoples of the world to join together to free all of those trapped in poverty. This is the only way in which we can atone for our collective failure to bring smiles to the faces of children across the globe.

Developing countries, especially those in Africa, are caught in a cycle of debt overhang. They face the greatest challenges of development, yet they have the fewest financial resources. Devoting large chunks of their national income — sometimes as high as 40 per cent — to debt servicing alone further compounds the problem. Our experience in Nigeria shows that the comprehensive programmes we have designed to tackle the issue of poverty among our children and women have been hampered by the lack of financial resources. Last year, Nigeria spent a whopping $1.7 billion to service external debts and only a paltry $300 million on the social sector — the sector most critical to children's and women's survival.

One practical measure to demonstrate our commitment would be to commence, without further delay, the implementation of the Millennium development goals. It is for this reason that Nigeria has consistently called for the cancellation of external debt. We are convinced that external debt is not only a burden, but also an obstacle to the prosecution of effective programmes targeted at children and women and designed to lift them out of poverty. One approach is for the creditor nations to write off these debts by converting them into development funds for poverty-reduction programmes for children and women.

Creditor nations need not worry that funds accruing from debt cancellation will be diverted for other purposes. We are all committed to the partnership in development. Consequently, we can jointly agree on programmes by which resources that would otherwise be used for debt servicing are to be channelled to the benefit of our children. In our view, this is the surest way of making our actions speak louder than our words. This is the surest way of making our world free, fit, secure and safe for our children. And this is the surest way of fostering a better future for the world's children, as they demanded this morning.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Bibi Shadick, Minister for Social Services of Guyana.

Mrs. Shadick (Guyana): More than a decade ago when the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the message was clear: our children and adolescents, while enjoying equal and inalienable rights as human beings, needed special care and protection for the achievement of their full potential. We all answered that call, and today the Convention has become the most widely ratified of international instruments, forming the basis of national and regional plans of action on children. We ensured that the first World Summit for Children, which focused on the survival, protection and development of children, was founded on those very principles of the Convention. This special session, which is expected to provide a common vision for a world fit for children, cannot ignore the important tenets established by the Convention.

Children and adolescents remain a vulnerable group in most societies. The global reports since 1990 that have addressed the situation of children admit that sustained intervention is needed if the rights of children are to be respected and promoted. In the area of health, for example, the right to health can be assured only through the reduction of childhood diseases as a result of greater immunization, improved health care and the provision of basic social services. At the same time, equal access to education, clean water, safe sanitation and improved nutrition have served to improve the health status of our children. A supportive environment for the family, the community and, particularly, mothers also provides much needed reinforcement for the well-being of children. Equally important are the eradication of poverty and illiteracy, the curtailment of the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its attendant effects on children, families, communities and the national economy, and equal access by all to information technology and the wonders of scientific and technological advances.

Guyana has borne witness to the virtue of sustained interventions for the benefit of children and adolescents. Through the national action plan for children, the key concerns of children and women have been kept on the political and social agenda of national authorities, and the achievement of identifiable goals has been monitored in a timely manner. In the plan, Guyana identified as priorities the family, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, education and literacy, children at risk — including the homeless and the disabled — and the legal and constitutional rights of the child. Successes have been recorded in all those areas, but more still needs to be done.

The Government of Guyana will maintain its current programme to provide basic sanitation and upgrade water systems in urban areas while expanding coverage in rural communities. Emphasis will similarly continue to be placed on the general management of the health delivery system, as well as on strengthening and expanding primary, secondary and tertiary health care, given the drastic reduction in infant mortality rates by approximately half over the past decade and the marked improvement of immunization coverage for all five antigens. Moreover, faced with the challenge of a growing number of HIV/AIDS-infected young people in the country, the Government is encouraging research on and the manufacture of antiretrovirals to facilitate the current programme at public hospitals of free medication to those affected, with particular emphasis on the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of the disease.

Recognizing the close link between education and health, the Government of Guyana is committed to realizing the right of every Guyanese citizen, as provided for by our Constitution, to free education from nursery school to university. At the same time, it has been acknowledged that the quality of, and access to, education could be further improved. In that regard, attention has been given to strengthening and expanding the educational infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. A literacy programme was launched in 1996 aimed at enhancing mechanical and critical reading skills, as well as consultation skills and building self-confidence. Likewise, policies are currently in place to reduce the incidence of out-of-

school children, increase the educational coverage of special-needs children, provide rehabilitation services to disabled children and their families and expand the coverage of early childhood and pre-school education.

National priorities this year have been aimed at realizing children's rights, including the right to an identity evidenced by a birth certificate, and at enacting a children's bill, as part of attempts to harmonize national laws with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In tandem with that bill, there is also a bill on the establishment of a family court with Supreme Court jurisdiction, and close attention is being given to upgrading judicial procedures for the de-institutionalization of children and the establishment and/or improvement of preventive and rehabilitative systems for children in conflict with the law, children in need of care and protection, abuse victims and child perpetrators, children and teenagers at risk and children with disabilities.

The persistence of poverty and its devastating impact on the lives of children remain a source of constant concern for the Government of Guyana. The complex nature of poverty in Guyana was the subject of a recent poverty alleviation strategy paper aimed at improving the lives of all Guyanese. In proposing strategies to deal with this affliction, the role of the international community cannot be ignored. Guyana was particularly pleased to note the new commitments made last April to increase the international funds available for the development of developing countries. Concerted efforts must continue to reverse the decline in overseas development assistance. The huge debt servicing obligations of poor countries must be addressed expeditiously if the latter are to play an active role in their own national development.

The continued trade barriers to the exports of developing countries must be dismantled. Global capital flows and investment must not be restricted to a handful of countries and regions. For Guyana, therefore, a world fit for children would be premised on dignity, equal and inalienable human rights, freedom, justice, peace, social progress and economic development. It would be a world in which global and national economic growth translates into social and economic well-being for all. There would be no need to set goals to reduce by half the more than 1 billion persons, mostly women and children, living in poverty. Research and development would be aimed at social progress rather than at profit and gain, so that affordable medical treatment for all would be available. Children would be guaranteed equal and high-quality education irrespective of their place of birth or their origin. There would be no breeding ground for the economic, sexual or other exploitation of children. The phenomenon of street children would disappear as families and individuals were provided with the economic and social support and opportunities needed to live comfortable lives. Combatants in wars would respect the sanctity of childhood.

As Guyanese, we are convinced that this vision is achievable. With a firm commitment at all levels to democracy, respect for the rule of law, and policies aimed at promoting equity, the foundation for social progress will be firmly laid. We urge all children, as they participate in this special session, to lead the way to a brighter future. For, indeed, they are not simply observers of the development process, but important actors whose views and actions will condition the world of tomorrow.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Pío Cabanillas, Minister/Spokesperson for the Government of Spain.

Mr. Cabanillas (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the European Union and to note that the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia — and the associated country of Cyprus align themselves with this statement.

I would like first of all to thank the Secretary-General for the excellent report entitled "We the Children", which constitutes a solid basis on which to develop future programmes for children and adolescents. I would also like to thank Ambassador Patricia Durrant, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session, and the other members of the Committee for the efforts devoted to this process.

Likewise, we would like to express our most sincere acknowledgement to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and to its Executive Director, Ms. Carol Bellamy, for their dedication and professionalism in improving the situation of children worldwide, and to the Fund's national committees for their excellent work of support and preparation.

The almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the impact it has had on the daily lives of children are, without comparison, the greatest achievement for children of the past decade. I reiterate that the Convention is without doubt the standard for all our work for and with children. Since the adoption of the Convention and the World Summit for Children in 1990, we have made concrete progress in all areas of human rights and in forging a global framework for poverty reduction. We have achieved this through the major United Nations conferences and conventions and their follow-up, culminating in the Millennium Declaration, which sets a clear agenda for the twenty-first century.

Furthermore, in all the countries of the European Union, the implementation of the Convention is high on our national agendas and part of policy- and decision-making in all areas. In this respect, the European Union is guided in all its actions on behalf of children by the Convention's four general principles: the best interest of the child, non-discrimination, survival and development, and participation.

Hence, the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights reaffirms the obligations to act in the best interest of children and to take their views into account. Moreover, mechanisms for monitoring compliance with the Convention have been put in place. In a great number of countries, offices of ombudsperson for children or similar institutions have been established. The Committee on the Rights of the Child accomplishes a fundamental function in reviewing progress and in making recommendations for the full implementation of the Convention.

The European Union has also promoted such juridical principles in the work of regional and global organizations, such as UNICEF, and we welcome the fact that they are now firmly entrenched in their mandates and programmes. The great increase in the number of non-governmental organizations and other grass-roots organizations that work to promote and protect the rights of the child around the world has also led to a global acceptance of the values and principles enshrined in the Convention.

We recommit ourselves today to the adoption of public policies for the recognition of the rights of the child in order to create a world fit for children. In this context, our priorities are as follows. First and foremost, we believe that our action for children should be firmly rooted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the legal basis of and essential reference in the realization of those rights. In this context, we urge all States parties immediately to withdraw all reservations that are incompatible with the objectives and ultimate aim of the Convention and regularly to review other reservations in view of withdrawing them.

The Convention has created a powerful force for strengthening the rights of children everywhere. We celebrate the recent entry into force of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on armed conflicts and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Given their importance, we strongly urge all States to sign and ratify and those that are parties to them fully to implement them.

Secondly, another key priority of the European Union is to work towards the abolition of the death penalty. In the context of this special session, we make an urgent call for an end to this practice and to life imprisonment for those who were under 18 years of age at the time the offence was committed.

Thirdly, the European Union is concerned that the sexual and reproductive health of young people has been a neglected area. In many countries, HIV/AIDS is spreading fastest among 15-to-24-year-olds; every year adolescents give birth to 30 million infants and many mothers under 20 are at risk of dying in childbirth. Moreover, being a teenage mother limits a girl's prospects for the future, especially with respect to income and education. We need to address these problems urgently. Young people should be empowered to make appropriate and safe choices about their sexual behaviour. They must be able to access high quality sexual and reproductive health information and services to achieve this, as we all agreed in Cairo and Beijing.

Fourthly, the Millennium development goals commit us to reducing child mortality by two thirds and maternal mortality by three quarters by 2015. To achieve these goals, we must develop fair, accessible and effective preventative and curative health and social services. Child labour was a prominent issue on the international agenda in the 1990s, culminating in the adoption of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 concerning the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. The European Union welcomes the growing number of States that have ratified ILO Convention No. 138 concerning minimum

age for admission to employment and underlines its importance to the effective abolition of child labour and in reining in the minimum age for admission to employment.

All States have also agreed to provide free primary education of good quality to boys and girls alike. This must be made available equally to children with physical or mental health disabilities. We need to ensure that children also learn such values as tolerance and respect for diversity and how to protect the environment. This underlines and reinforces our belief that children must have the right to live free of racism, xenophobia, intolerance and all forms of discrimination.

We take our obligations to listening to boys and girls seriously when considering issues that affect them. We recognize children as active participants in the construction of our societies and perceive the importance of their vision and priorities in the formulation of a common future strategy. This special session formally recognizes that importance and a sign of it is the presence of those children among us. We are listening to their recommendations with great interest.

The goals that I have outlined are ambitious, but, I believe, achievable. We are convinced that the fulfilment of the rights of the child is a task and responsibility of everyone. International cooperation and collaboration can contribute to fully achieving the obligations and principles of the Convention throughout the world. To that end, we will build on the Monterrey Consensus and its agreement to forge a new partnership between all our countries in accordance with our repeated commitment to achieving the goal of channelling 0.7 per cent of our gross national product to official development assistance. The States members of the European Union have decided to do what they must collectively to reach an average of 0.39 per cent in the European Union by 2006.

We must ensure that the plan of action we shall agree on here does not remain words alone. We recognize that we will be accountable to all our children if we do not deliver on this. Therefore, while we have made much progress, there is still much to be done in facing the challenges at hand. The tragic events of 11 September made clear how fragile peace is and strengthened our conviction of the need to put in place a plan of action that is both clear and demanding, in view of ensuring a comprehensive human rights framework on behalf of children. We hope that this special session will offer an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the rights of the child worldwide. We believe that this is the only way for humanity to progress and develop.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Diarra Asoussatou Thiero, Minister for the Advancement for Women, Children and the Family of the Republic of Mali.

Mrs. Thiero (Mali) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to convey to the President every wish for success from His Excellency Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, President of the Republic of Mali, who, for reasons of state, could not be present today to share with us his reflections on building a world fit for children. I should also like to pay tribute to the positive and determined action of the United Nations Children's Fund, under the leadership of Ms. Carol Bellamy, to make children's issues a political priority for the Organization and for the future of our States.

Twelve years ago, the world's leaders undertook commitments to protect children's rights in their entirety. Mali, which co-chaired the 1990 World Summit for Children, has respected its commitments through a series of actions at the national, regional and international levels. At the national level, I should like to mention the adoption of the 1992-2000 National Plan of Action, comprising the elements of the survival, the development and the protection of children, and the establishment of a children's parliament and of an inter-ministerial committee for the implementation of the Plan of Action. We have concluded the formalities for the adoption of a code of protection for children. We have also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols as well as other treaties relating to children's rights adopted by the Organization.

The draft outcome document entitled "A world fit for children" (A/AC.256/CRP.6/Rev.3), which my delegation would like to see adopted at the end of the current session, reaffirms the commitments of the 1990 World Summit. In that regard, we support the provisions contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/S-27/3) and in the Plan of Action, which truly support the world movement in favour of children. From that perspective, Mali hosted the first international meeting for the harmonization of national legislation against the exploitation of children in

French-speaking and other African countries. That important meeting established the principal guidelines for the protection of children from all forms of sexual and economic exploitation, abuse and violence; it covered issues of education and child labour, as well as the protection of children in armed conflicts and displaced and refugee children.

We also formulated and implemented a joint plan of action between the Government and civil society to follow up on the world movement in favour of children. Along those lines, we devised a plan of action to combat trafficking in children and, together with Côte d'Ivoire, signed a bilateral convention — the first of its kind in Africa — to combat such trafficking. Furthermore, in May 2001, Mali organized a meeting of the first ladies of West and Central Africa to discuss ways of reducing maternal and infant mortality by 2010.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize that together we can and should make this a world fit for children, freed from the scourges of poverty, war and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in conformity with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Mali will play its full part in that crusade, because now is the time to proceed from words to action.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Roberto Interiano, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of El Salvador.

Mr. Interiano (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to convey to the President and to the other members of the Bureau our sincere congratulations on your election to lead the work of this significant special session of the General Assembly devoted to children. For reasons that are well known to all, this special session had to be postponed until today, but we have come together in the same constructive and determined spirit to adopt decisions in favour of children. I should also like to convey to the Secretary-General my delegation's recognition of his undeniable leadership and his efforts to ensure that the voice of children is heard loud and clear in this world forum. We further hail the valuable contribution of the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in support of those efforts.

Beginning with the World Summit for Children and our ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in May 1990, we defined national commitments that took shape in a Plan of Action for Children 1991-2000. The signing of the peace agreements in January 1992 not only enabled us to end the armed conflict, but also marked a starting point for joining our efforts to continue supporting the foundations of peace and the construction of a healthier, more educated and more democratic society.

As a country, we have made important institutional and legal advances that have had a direct impact on the lives of our children and adolescents. We have formulated national policies and have created institutions and legislative provisions to promote the protection of at-risk and socially excluded children as well as the protection of the rights and the advancement of women.

El Salvador is a country that is highly vulnerable to natural disasters. But we have promoted important educational reforms that require greater levels of decentralization and of participation by the community and by children themselves. We have revised the academic curriculum, incorporating important elements such as values, gender issues, human rights and environmental protection. We are consolidating health-sector reform, also on the basis of those same principles.

In 1999 we began public consultations with children and adolescents, State entities and civil society to formulate a national policy for the comprehensive development of children and adolescents, with a focus on rights. It promotes the creation of an institutional political framework that will respond to current issues — the harmonization of legislation; the active participation of the community, children and adolescents; and the importance of local management, mechanisms for protection, oversight and social communication — as the foundation for the shared, inescapable responsibility that we have towards children.

We are coordinating an integrated effort by the three branches of the State to formulate a draft for a code on children and adolescents. We also have the National Council of Mental Health, which shows the high priority that the Government places on the promotion of the mental health of the entire population, along with treatment and rehabilitation.

The Salvadoran Institute for the Protection of Minors, created in 1993, has been reorganized and now

plays a greater role in promoting, supervising and evaluating and less of an executive role. It coordinates the implementation of the national policy in favour of children without ignoring special protection for socially disadvantaged children and adolescents. Furthermore, it has developed more comprehensive programmes to promote the reintegration of juvenile offenders into society.

The national Young Country programme mobilizes the resources of 17 public and private institutions, and places at the disposal of children, adolescents and young adults real participatory spaces to promote sports, recreation, culture, environmental protection, disaster prevention, technical and vocational training, the protection of cultural identity and the organization of youth, and facilitates their productive integration into society.

The strategy adopted by the Alliance for the Implementation of Policy on Children has strengtnened health programmes and improved comprehensive clinical and community attention for children and the family. A programme for early attention and basic education is being strengthened through an alliance with Save the Children. Food and nutrition programmes are being implemented with the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United States Agency for International Development and UNICEF. A national programme is being formulated for the progressive eradication of the worst forms of child labour, and sexual commercial exploitation of and the traffic in children. Actions are also being developed to promote breastfeeding.

A number of laws have been passed, among them the family code, a law to protect against and prevent HIV/AIDS, a law against violence within the family, a law on juvenile offenders and a law on the protection of the environment. Furthermore, we have ratified Conventions 138 and 182 of the International Labour Organization, along with other provisions in favour of children and adolescents.

Progress has been made in the majority of our goals. However, the challenges continue to be significant. This situation is made worse by economic and social instability abroad; the presence of preventable diseases; the proliferation of HIV/AIDS; the traffic in and use of drugs; poverty and its consequences; adolescent pregnancies; maternal and infant malnutrition; the presence of organized networks; and the lack of social awareness of the abuse that is a scourge on the basic rights of children and adolescents.

It is our responsibility as leaders of the world to join efforts to combat poverty and corruption, decrease bureaucracy and generate opportunities for development for the family and its members. Whatever we do today constructively is what will remain in our history, because life demands love and respect, progress, courage and determination. If we speak of justice, justice and wisdom dictate that we should provide our children and adolescents with the opportunities they truly need.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Imre Szakács, State Secretary, Ministry of Youth and Sports of Hungary.

Mr. Szakács (Hungary): A major concern of my Government over the past four years has been to become a Government for families. To achieve that aim, we have defined new principles for the support of families and children over the past four years.

My Government has come up with a set of principles for a national family policy, the aim of which is to enhance the living standards of families, to consolidate the security of family life and to encourage population growth. The policy has been introduced to ensure that a family's right to allowances does not depend on income. Rather, it is a civic right, thus rewarding the raising of children. The assistance given to families with children involves, on the one hand, general allowances for all families with children and, on the other hand, additional special support to families in unfavourable conditions. Such special support aims at helping children from poor families to catch up. Our childcare act incorporates a supplementary family allowance into the family support system, replacing regular childcare support, and it offers a one-time educational allowance for children who are going to school.

The Government of Hungary, out of concern for the situation of children and youth, set up a Ministry of Youth and Sports in early 1999. One of the major modifications in the childcare act was the creation of the posts of child's rights representatives and official family and child commissioners, charged with the

effective safeguarding of children's rights. These legal posts will take effect in 2003.

In addition, we have established a youth communication system, which primarily aims at involving child and youth organizations in defining governmental priorities and the broadest possible division of resources. Particular attention has been paid to working closely with large family organizations and those representing the disabled. The Government has launched several programmes supporting the creation and operation of child and youth self-governments to encourage involvement by children.

Last year, a campaign was initiated to counter media programmes that have become overwhelmed by aimless violence. Our long-term aim is to create a trademark, as it were, that would cover all areas involving children and youngsters, and would serve as a signal to the parents that the programmes contained no violence.

In terms of the protection of children and youngsters, we are focusing on the suppression of drug abuse. A drug strategy has been worked out and was approved last year by the Government and the opposition parties alike. New drug prevention model projects have been launched with the assistance of the Government, encompassing drug prevention in schools. In addition, my Government has taken steps to protect young people from drug abuse by supporting institutions that provide alternative leisure activities and sports programmes.

In November 2001, we were proud to host a successful European regional meeting on actions against the sexual harassment of children in cooperation with the Council of Europe and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). It was an honour for us that the representative of the Government of Hungary presented the conclusions of the meeting at the second World Conference against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held last December at Yokohama.

During the 12 years since the political changes occurred in Hungary, the conditions have evolved for putting forward a new vision of the future for young generations. The information society has become a reality, and our joining the European Union is at hand. It is important for young generations not only that a new vision of the future take shape, but that a new basis be found for the relationship between the State and its young citizens. Young generations are exposed to several controversial influences in this dynamically mobile society. There is an urgent need for the State to assume a new role in offering guidance to young people so that they can differentiate between what is valuable and what is valueless in our ever changing world. The State considers it important to help young citizens to define themselves through special measures and legislation.

A Youth Act is now being drafted in accordance with those principles. It is aimed at reaching our goal of giving local governments a special allocation for youth affairs from the State budget. Thus they will be able to finance child and youth facilities. It is also important to mention that a provision of the draft Youth Act provides free Internet access to every young person.

The Government of the Republic of Hungary is strongly committed to the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. That significant international legal document provides an appropriate basis for respect for children's rights. In this context, I would like to stress that Hungary is a party to almost all human rights conventions, including instruments on children. My Government has signed the two Optional Protocols of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the constitutional process of ratification is under way.

I am fully convinced that children should be involved in the preparation of the decision-making process with respect to their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to express our gratitude to the Preparatory Committee for its efforts to draw up a consensus-based, coherent and forward-looking final document for this special session. Hungary shares the concern that there is a significant gap between political intentions and the results achieved. In that context, I would like to emphasize that we will do our best to have a final document that describes priorities and target-oriented aims in terms of full respect for the rights of the child.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on Mr. Jean Delacroix Bakoniarivo, Chairman of the delegation of Madagascar.

Mr. Bakoniarivo (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): I am delighted at the opportunity offered to

me by the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, devoted to children, to share with the entire international community the concerns and the hope inspired in the Malagasy nation by the idea of creating a world fit for children. I am convinced that the President's diplomatic talents and wealth of experience will contribute to the success of the session, with results that are in keeping with our expectations.

I wish to extend my warmest congratulations to Her Excellency Miss Patricia Durrant, Permanent Representative of Jamaica and Chair of the Preparatory Committee for the effective way in which she conducted the work of the Committee. I also wish to congratulate the other members of the Committee's Bureau.

I cannot continue my remarks without thanking the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his very thorough report (A/S-27/3), which has served as a foundation for our discussions, and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Carol Bellamy, and her team for their considerable worldwide outreach effort regarding the needs and the rights of children, particularly their contribution as the secretariat of this session.

In accordance with the objectives of the 1990 World Summit for Children, Madagascar welcomes the results of regional preparatory conferences for the special session of the General Assembly on children, particularly the Pan African Forum on the Future of Children entitled "Africa fit for children", held in Egypt from 28 to 31 May 2001. A common African position, to which Madagascar subscribes fully, has been drawn up by the secretariat of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in consultation with competent African and international institutions, as well as civil society and non-governmental organizations.

Furthermore, Madagascar endorses the recommendations and the provisions set forth in the various instruments and declarations of the Organization of African Unity and other bodies, dealing with problems relating to the rights and the well-being of children, such as the Bamako Initiative on the survival, development and universal immunization of children in Africa; the Declaration on AIDS and the child in Africa, adopted at the thirtieth OAU summit, held in 1994; the 1995 Tunis Declaration on the Follow-up of the Mid-decade Goals for the Child; the 1996 OAU resolution proclaiming the period 1997 through 2006 the Decade for Education in Africa; and the third summit of the Mission of African First Ladies for peace and humanitarian issues held in Libreville in May 2001.

We are all aware that the Declaration and the Plan of Action adopted by the World Summit for Children constitute an international commitment whose implementation has been followed up with the greatest possible rigour. Furthermore, the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified or signed by a record total of 192 States, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, is evidence of the efforts made for children by States, although achievements have so far remained modest.

Furthermore, the participation in the Children's Forum of more than 400 children from the four corners of the Earth, the strong participation in this special session on children, the attendance by numerous heads of State or Government, leaders of national and international non-governmental organizations, and members of civil society, parliamentarians, the media, United Nations bodies, and donors all indicate the great political will shared by the entire international community to supplement efforts already being made to achieve the Summit goals both at the national and the international levels. Therefore, this session provides us an ideal opportunity to renew our commitment, because there can be no doubt that a great deal remains to be done.

In that connection, Madagascar deplores the fact that poverty persists in many countries and believes it essential to place its eradication at the forefront, to give priority to providing the resources pledged at the Summit, nationally and internationally, to increase investment in social services; to strengthen regional and international cooperation on technical, legislative, financial, material and other means to eliminate dangerous work for children, the exploitation of their labour, the sale of and traffic in children, and other forms of atrocities that victimize them; and to intensify scientific research to combat HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases such as malaria, which are the cause of most child deaths in developing countries, particularly in Africa.

Likewise, we must strengthen technical cooperation and ensure the transfer of technology, so that all children can have access to the knowledge they

need in the context of the promotion of education for all.

It is equally important to spell out the various steps taken to maintain peace and to prevent conflicts, which are resulting in increasing violations of the rights of children, and to strengthen already existing machinery to provide humanitarian assistance in the case of natural disasters, in order first and foremost to meet the needs of women and children and to devote particular attention to refugee children in developing countries, particularly in Africa.

In this context, it is high time for the international community to respond promptly to the appeal made by the Millennium Summit that priority be accorded to children in Africa, who are the principal victims of the evils of our times.

On behalf of the Republic of Madagascar, I should like to reiterate the commitments undertaken during the World Summit for Children, in which our delegation participated. The participation in the Summit and the presence of Malagasy child representatives at that meeting is evidence of our political will to do more for children, whom we consider not only as necessary stakeholders in the present but also as builders of the future.

At the national level, Madagascar has drawn up a programme of action for social reconstruction that is aimed at reducing infant and maternal mortality as well as the malnutrition rate. Two committees were set up to ensure the implementation and follow-up of the plan: a steering committee, under the supervision of the plan Ministry and comprising senior officials from sectoral departments of the Ministry, non-governmental organizations and donors; and a social rehabilitation unit comprising various representatives from sectoral ministries working in the social area.

Furthermore, combating poverty, the imbalance in food security, and social reconstruction all are related measures that have priority in the Government programme.

At the international level, the signing by the President of the Republic of Madagascar on 7 September 2000, as part of the Millennium Summit, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography shows that Madagascar is determined to work for children.

Donors participated in the implementation of the national programme of action for social reconstruction according to their mandates. Thus the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) achieved its Summit objectives partly through the framework of the cooperation plan between Madagascar and UNICEF 1996-2000.

Following the identification of further constraints that have been hindering the achievement of some of the objectives set for the decade — such as those related to droughts, cyclones, locusts and so on — an emergency segment was added to the plan. In addition, United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the United Nations Population Fund all have been involved, along with other partners such as the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the European Development Fund, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the United States Agency for International Development, the Economic Commission for Europe, and the French Cooperation.

In view of the foregoing, I should like, on behalf of the delegation of Madagascar, to express our deep appreciation to all of those agencies that have been working for Malagasy children and to appeal to them to ensure that priority should always be accorded to children in all human development programmes.

May I also act as the spokesman for the children of Madagascar and read out the message they wish to convey to the Assembly on this historic occasion:

> "We ask that the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child be scrupulously respected and translated into concrete action in our daily lives,, so that young people can participate more actively in the life of the citizenry through State-recogmized structural networks. It is essential that the children's parliament should become a reality, and that the rights of handicapped persons should be taken into greater account both nationally and internationally."

As an immediate response to this request, which is entirely justified, I say "yes" for children.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Ms. Bellamy (United Nations Children's Fund): Twelve years after the World Summit for Children, it is impossible not to feel the acceleration of history. We live in a world where the only constant is change — where what was beyond imagination yesterday has already happened today.

By the same token, who at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) could have imagined, as they sat calculating milk rations for hungry children in post-war Europe, that 56 years later UNICEF would be engaged on a global scale in development, child rights, and humanitarian relief?

The World Summit for Children and the decade that followed was a time of even more dizzying change and of significant progress for children. Soon after the Convention on the Rights of the Child had gone into force in record time, 71 world leaders agreed to a set of ambitious, time-bound goals for child survival and development, with a priority for children caught up in armed conflict and violence, neglect, cruelty and exploitation and all of the countless other horrific consequences of poverty and discrimination.

James Grant, my wonderfully distinguished predecessor, marvelled at the ripple effects of the Summit, noting that a number of international financial institutions seemed to be warming to the idea that development begins with people and that the well-being of the child is not only a principled objective of people-centred development, but also a major means of achieving that development.

As we confer here today, a dozen years later, what would have astonished us at the World Summit has become the norm at the special session on children. Child rights, women's rights and people-centred development are now widely regarded as ideas whose time has come. This is the first time that the General Assembly has addressed the issue of children in a special session. Never has a major United Nations meeting invited so many children and young people to participate as official representatives — over 250 at last count and going up — most of whom prepared for the work ahead by attending a three-day Children's Forum nearby.

As I told the young representatives at the Children's Forum closing yesterday afternoon, their participation is what makes the special session special. UNICEF hopes that the leadership that they have already shown at the Children's Forum this week will inspire world leaders to join the drive for a more just and peaceful world.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child helped usher in a decade that saw reductions in iodine deficiency disorders through salt iodization and an immunization drive that has now brought polio to the brink of eradication, allowed widespread distribution of vitamin A supplements and sparked progress in promoting the many benefits of breastfeeding.

These are all significant achievements, literally unimaginable half a century ago — and they would not have been possible without the vital partnerships that have developed among Governments, donors, international institutions and broad aspects of civil society, including non-governmental organizations, community and grass-roots groups, families and children themselves. They demonstrate what can be done when commitments are matched by resources and political will.

But for all the millions of young lives that have been saved, and for all the futures that have been enhanced, we have failed to reach most of the key survival and development goals that were set at the World Summit in such areas as basic education, under 5 mortality, maternal mortality, child malnutrition and sanitation. Indeed, as we crossed into the twenty-first century, children under the age of 5 were dying at the rate of 11 million a year, most of them from totally preventable causes, such as diarrhoea, measles and acute respiratory infections. Some 50 million children were malnourished, often at a cost of developmental handicaps that last a lifetime; and 120 million children of primary-school age, about 60 per cent of whom were girls, were not in class.

The proliferation of armed conflict is continuing, growing and taking a horrific toll on children — and it sets the stage for wars that are passed from generation to generation. As the excellent Graça Machel observed in her landmark United Nations report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1), millions of children are slaughtered, raped, maimed, exploited as soldiers and exposed to unspeakable brutality. There is also growing recognition that other

forms of violence constitute a vast, under-recognized and underreported barrier to child survival and development. Violence keeps children — especially girls — out of school, and it is a major health problem.

Progress for children has also been greatly hampered by the explosion of the pandemic of HIV/AIDS — which is so devastating that it is already reversing decades of hard-won gains for children — as well as by the growing number of humanitarian crises that involve children and, of course, by the long decline in official development assistance.

Poverty, inequity, joblessness and social upheaval are all growing as rapidly as the human population, and the prospects for relief have been clouded by the spread of global economic distress. Moreover, the terrorist attacks of 11 September last have stirred fresh insecurities. They have traumatized countless children and have, unfortunately, inspired the shift of vast budgetary resources into military spending — resources that might otherwise have gone, at least in part, to basic social services.

Yet for all the uncertainty in the world, the future remains in our hands as never before. That is why this special session is so important. It is an opportunity for the General Assembly not only to review progress since the World Summit 12 years ago, but to re-energize the international commitment to realizing a global vision for children now and in the years to come.

As the Secretary-General has pointed out, in a $30 trillion plus global economy, the knowledge, resources and strategies exist to give children the best possible start in life in terms of quality primary education and help in navigating the complex passage from adolescence to adulthood.

Creating a world that is truly fit for children does not imply simply the absence of war. It means having the confidence that our children will not die of measles or malaria. It means having access to clean water and proper sanitation. It means having primary schools near by that educate children free of charge. It means changing the world with children, ensuring their right to participate and ensuring that their views are heard and considered. It means building a world fit for children, where every child can grow to adulthood as a person in health, peace and dignity.

All this will require the exercise of leadership, from the pinnacles of government to civil society at every level — from non-governmental organizations and business and private enterprise, to religious groups and academia, communities, media, grass-roots organizations, families and children themselves.

The world we seek has remained a dream for more years than any of us can count. But we at UNICEF are convinced that working together we can make that dream come true. We can make it come true for each and every child on the earth. As the young Dag Hammarskjöld wrote in his journal:

> "Never measure the height of a mountain until you have reached the top; then you will see how low it is."

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Mr. Ruud Lubbers, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Mr. Lubbers (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): Allow me to begin by saying a few words of thanks to my friend and colleague, Carol Bellamy, for her wonderful statement and for all her efforts for this children's summit. I would also like to thank her for her efforts with regard to refugee children; I am here as the High Commissioner to say a few words on their behalf.

Almost half of the 21 million people of concern to my Office are under the age of 18. Refugee youngsters do not have a Government which takes care of them. But these children deserve special attention. They are often exposed to armed conflict and lack access to food, water, shelter and basic health care. They are often separated from their families during flight; they are sometimes subjected to sexual abuse and violence; they are vulnerable to manipulation and forced military recruitment; and they are often exposed to HIV/AIDS. Their education is often disrupted at a crucial stage in their development.

I have had the opportunity to meet many refugee children. Let me say that they all have some overarching dreams in common: enough food and other basic assistance; a secure environment; reunification with their families; and access to education, sports and help to enable them to become self-reliant through skills training.

Refugee children are just children — youngsters, with their dreams. Let me briefly highlight a few

topics. First, children are often separated from their parents during flight. If they have lost their parents, they have to find their own way, unaccompanied, very often taking care of other siblings. It is a priority for us, of course, to find solutions and we work with others, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Children's Fund, to find them.

One positive example is in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Between 1994 and 1998, we found solutions for the reunification of some 62,000 Rwandan children. That, of course, is only part of the story. There are so many of them, so this is a continuous effort in countries where there is violence, but, frankly speaking, we also have an enormous challenge in the mature economies, where we see many unaccompanied children. They need proper and fair treatment, but what often happens is that we find them back in detention centres, where they are very near — alongside, one might say — common criminals. This, of course, is totally unfair and irresponsible.

Another issue is the vulnerability of refugee children to violence, exploitation and abuse. This, of course, is very dramatic, given their age and vulnerable circumstances. Things happen that simply should not happen. We have become more and more aware recently that we in the humanitarian world have to do better. We have to do better in the organization of refugee camps and food distribution systems to prevent sexual violence and exploitation. We are determined to seek a stricter code of conduct that totally excludes any sexual contact or relations with minors and, even beyond that, with all beneficiaries of humanitarian action if humanitarian workers are in those regions. There is only way one to address this, as the Secretary-General has said: a zero-tolerance approach. One case is one too many. We must be very tough on this.

I wish to add one word, however. It is too easy to say that this is a problem of a code of conduct. It starts with another problem: the problem of abject poverty and the totally unacceptable low levels of food assistance in refugee camps. In seemingly hopeless environments, the poor and the dispossessed are often forced to resort to desperate measures to survive. A couple of weeks ago in Geneva, where we discuss human rights, I said simply that the States of this world are violating human rights by not providing sufficient assistance in those situations. We should not, therefore, be surprised that things happen that are totally contrary to the dignity of human beings.

Another issue is education, which is always the first priority of refugee youngsters. We address it in terms of primary and secondary education. They want to go further in life. Through the Refugee Education Trust, an initiative of my predecessor, Sadako Ogata, we are trying to spread education further.

Refugee children are not only vulnerable persons; they are very vulnerable, but also something beyond that. They also have their own dignity, their own identity and their own individuality that they want to develop. Therefore, working hard for a safe environment and sufficient assistance, I decided to invite development possibilities into the equation. So I found a famous movie actress, Angelina Jolie, available to show solidarity with those youngsters. I think it is key when a famous movie actress steps out of the glitter of Hollywood and goes to the refugee camps. Another example is my partnership with my friend Johan Koss, a famous skater with gold medals and all that. He is working on Olympic Aid. I said: "Johan, this is great, but do not forget my refugees. Partner with me so that, in refugee camps, youngsters can practice sports like others." It is so important for them. We are already doing that at 30 sites. A third example is Jane Goodall. She is known from the world of the environment and nature. Some call her the "chimpanzee woman". We sat down and I said: "Would it not be good to bring some new initiative to the refugee camps?" And she said to me: "Yes, I have a good programme. It is called 'Roots and Shoots'. It involves inviting youngsters to participate in community projects and to take care of the environment." We are going to do that in refugee camps, too. This is great for the youngsters themselves. As they see themselves developing in dignity, they will partner up with youngsters outside refugee camps.

These are just three examples to explain that, beyond the vulnerability, we must build for the future. Believe me, refugees and refugee children have the capacity to become very valuable citizens of our world. That world is obliged to give them that opportunity. This is my very modest contribution to this children's summit.

The meeting rose at 8.25 p.m.